

DRAFT

**NATIONAL ECO-TOURISM STRATEGY
FOR BULGARIA**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AITO	Association of Independent Touroperators
BARET	Bulgarian Association of Rural and Ecological Tourism
BATA	The Bulgarian Association of Travel Agents
BCEG	Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project
BCP	Border Crossing Point
BDZ	Bulgarian State Railways
BHRKA	The Bulgarian Hotel and Restaurant Keepers Association
BSPB	Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
BTU	Bulgarian Tourist Union
CE	Concil of Europe
CHCP	Cultural Heritage Conservation Plans
CM	Cultural Monuments
CMMA	Cultural Monuments and Museums Act
CORINE	A Pan-European program for gathering, coordinating and provision of constant information about the condition of environment and natural resources in Europe; Functional in Bulgaria since 1994, and 141 nature conservation sites have been identified
CTDS	Cultural Tourism Development Strategy
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMS	Environment Management System
EU	European Union
FLAG	Firm Level Assistance Group
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System
GTZ	Technical Cooperation Office (Germany)
IATA	International Association of Tourist Agencies
IBA	Birdlife International's "Important Bird Areas in Bulgaria Program"
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
ISPA	International Investment Program
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature (World Conservation Union)
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
JOBS	Job Opportunities through Business Support
MOAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forests
MOC	Ministry of Culture
MOE	Ministry of Economy
MOEW	Ministry of Environment and Waters
MRDPW	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Work
MRS	Mountain Rescue Service
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NATURA 2000	European Ecological Net (for the EU contries and the contries from Central and East Europe, in integration process), contents territories under protection according to the requirements of the Bird and Habitats Directive
NBDCS	National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy
NEN	National Ecological Network
NETS	National Eco-Tourism Strategy

NFPS	National Forest Policy and Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NICM	National Institute for Cultural Monuments (
NNPS	National Nature Protection Service
NRDP	National Regional Development Plan
NTC	National Tourism Council
OAD	Official Assistance for Development
PA	Protected Area
PAMP	Protected Area Management Plan
PHARE	Programme that is one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the European Communities to assist the applicant countries of central Europe in their preparations for joining the European Union
PREST	Project for Ecological and Sustainable Tourism
PTF	Pirin Tourist Forum
RAMSAR	Convention on Wetlands adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971. Ramsar is the only global environmental treaty dealing with a particular ecosystem
SAPARD	EU Investment pre-accession Funds in the Field of Agriculture and Forestry
SG	State Gazette
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SVS	Schweizer Vogleschutz, Birdlife Switzerland
TIES	International Eco-tourism Society
TINA Network	Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment Network
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Program
UNESCO	Abbreviation for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a structure of the United Nations Organization for education, science and culture; supports cooperation between countries in indicated areas.
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Tourism Organization

1. Introduction

The **National Eco-Tourism Strategy** for Bulgaria (NETS) reflects the growing, popular appeal of tourism development at a scale that is comprehensible to many Bulgarians. NETS was developed in response to a number of local and regional initiatives associated with marketing nature conservation, local traditions and culture as alternatives to mass tourism, and the need for businesses that can be managed by people without large amounts of money. The growth of the conservation and eco-tourism movement is a logical one for this period of transition to a market economy. Both developed in response to concerns for environmental quality. Biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage and eco-tourism are logical partners, as each is needed to realize their individual aims.

NETS contributes in an important way to the consolidation of eco-tourism as practiced in Bulgaria, and to the integration of eco-tourism into the national tourism development agenda. The development of NETS acknowledges that eco-tourism is a significant part of Bulgaria's sustainable development agenda, providing Bulgaria with a framework for developing eco-tourism policy and for linking eco-tourism with integrated land use and land use planning. It provides Bulgaria with a tool to galvanize local social and political elements of tourism development and relate them immediately to income generation, economic growth, and improvements in rural economies. Eco-tourism gives value to local practices and traditions. Eco-tourism embraces scales of economic growth and business performance that are sustainable.

The National Eco-tourism Strategy establishes Bulgaria as model for eco-tourism development in the Balkans and Europe. It is important for Bulgarians to appreciate that the cornerstones of our national pride – the country's natural environment, traditions and customs, history, and way of rural life have value for Bulgaria and for the world. Bulgaria can begin to capitalize on these cornerstones as the country's competitive advantage in a world that is persistently losing these values.

The National Eco-tourism Strategy outlines the development of eco-tourism in Bulgaria for a *period of ten years*. Because Bulgaria possesses so many preconditions for eco-tourism, it has a strategic opportunity to turn eco-tourism into a major sub-sector of the country's economy. NETS defines the geographical priorities for eco-tourism development in Bulgaria

Eco-tourism Defined

Eco-tourism has been marketed as a form of nature-based tourism; however since 1990 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), development experts, and academics have studied it as a sustainable development tool. The term eco-tourism refers on the one hand to a concept based on a set of principles, and on the other hand to a specific market segment. In 1991, the International Eco-tourism Society produced one of the earliest definitions:

“Eco-tourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people.”

In 1996, the World Conservation Union (formerly the IUCN) said that eco-tourism:

“...is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.”

In all cases, eco-tourism aims to achieve sustainable development results. It is important to stress that all tourism activities, be they geared to holidays, business, conferences, congresses or fairs, health, adventure or eco-tourism, should aim to be sustainable. This means that the planning and development of tourism infrastructure, its subsequent operation, and its marketing should focus on environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability criteria.

The strong orientation of eco-tourism toward principles, guidelines, and certification based on sustainability standards gives it an unusual position in the tourism field. In the years since the concept was first defined, a consensus has formed on the basic elements of eco-tourism:

- Contributes to conservation of biodiversity
- Sustains the well being of local people
- Includes an interpretative/learning experience
- Involves responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry
- Is delivered primarily to small groups by small-scale businesses
- Requires the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources
- Stresses local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for rural people

General International and National Trends of Tourism Development

The eco-tourism is part of a growing niche market of the tourism industry. The World Tourism Organization estimates 595 million international travelers in 1997 expending \$425 billion. Tourist arrivals are predicted to grow an average of 4.3% per year over the next 20 years with receipts climbing by 6.7% per year. Nature tourism generates 7% of all international travel expenditures (Lindbergh, 1997). The World Resources Institute (1990) found that **overall tourism grows at an annual rate of 4% while nature travel increases 10% to 30% per year.**

Thus, there is a tendency towards dynamic growth of the potential market of ecotourism products for Bulgaria. There is a real opportunity for Bulgaria to become a regional and European leader in this emerging market.

Tourism to Bulgaria is on the rise. International tourist arrivals increased in 2002 by 8.6% over 2001, representing 2,992,590 international tourists, according to the Ministry of Economy. The income generated from tourism increased by 11.1% over 2001 – 1,334 billion USD (transportation excluded). Expenditures by Bulgarian tourists abroad increased by 8.24%, compared to 2001.

The largest share of visitors came from Germany. During 2002, 480,460 German tourists visited Bulgaria, up 28.35 percent over 2001. The largest increase in visitors was from Britain. Up sixty percent from the following year, 110,902 British visited Bulgaria in the first eight months of 2002. These tourism market trends bode well for Bulgaria and could reflect positively on the development of its eco-tourism market segment.

The Challenges of Biodiversity Conservation, Cultural Heritage and Economic Growth

Bulgaria is the first European country to develop and adopt a National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy (NBDCS). Since that time, Bulgaria has consistently developed policy and basic legislation necessary to support the implementation of modern nature management practices. Two elements are critical to sustaining these achievements. The first is that protected area management must include benefits for the people living around them; and the second is that financial mechanism must be developed to sustain both conservation activities and rural improvements in livelihood. Bulgaria's cultural heritage is faced with the same challenge. It must provide benefits to the people who preserve the nation's important cultural heritage, and it must develop the financial mechanisms and incentives that allow individuals and the Government to preserve the diversity of the national cultural heritage.

Over the past twelve years Bulgaria has been in a period of difficult transition. Changes have led to significant impoverishment of many people residing mainly in small, rural settlements. Most of these people live in close proximity to valuable natural sites, and cultural and historic monuments. Eco-tourism provides once important opportunity for these regions to recover economically. Natural and cultural resources are available for development and significant investments are not required. And since eco-tourism is usually developed as a small or family business, it can provide more local people with the incentives to stay and work in rural areas, stem emigration, and create many more centers of local economic prosperity.

Many attempts have been made to practice various forms of ecological, cultural, and other forms of sustainable tourism in Bulgaria. To date, there has been no systematic approach and strategic consistency to these efforts. A sustainable, eco-tourism development strategy will help to guide the country's tourism development efforts. The Strategy will further Bulgaria's efforts to provide regional leadership, and to give the country a competitive edge in both the expanding domestic and international tourism markets. Bulgaria is among the first countries in Europe to develop an eco-tourism strategy of this scale.

The Strategic Planning Process

The National Eco-Tourism Strategy originates from a host of different initiatives. Some of these initiatives have been based on private-sector efforts to offer alternatives to mass tourism. Bilateral and multi-lateral donors have supported some of these efforts. Other initiatives include the efforts of protected areas to engage communities in protected area tourism development activities inside and outside parks. The Ministry of Environment and Waters, through the Bulgarian National Parks have taken the lead in these community, eco-tourism development efforts linked to protected areas. "Models" for community based eco-tourism were implemented by the Rila and Central Balkan National Parks, with the support of the Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project, on behalf of United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-Bulgaria and the Ministry. The National Parks' working model included establishing eco-tourism partnerships that were the products of a "participatory planning process". These partnerships work to support the mutual interests of local tourist development and to promote local involvement in nature conservation efforts. The successful work of these partnerships led to the establishment of two eco-tourism associations: Rila Eco-tourism Association-Samokov and Eco-tourism Association Central Balkan-Kalofer. The Associations are institutional partners of the National Parks and the leaders of eco-tourism initiatives in their communities and the surrounding regions.

The success of these models, as well as the efforts of other protected areas and regional eco-tourism associations, were responsible for the creation of a National Eco-tourism Working Group in February 2002. This group was charged with analyzing conditions and recommending improvements to the national tourism policy to support eco-tourism development. The Working Group included representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, representatives of national, regional and local tourism associations, conservation NGOs, and the Foundation for Local Government Reform.

The Ministry of Economy challenged the Working Group to draft a national eco-tourism strategy as a component of the National Tourism Development Strategy. The planning process began in May 2002 with participation from the private sector, the civil society, key national level governmental institutions including the Ministry of Culture, and local authorities. US AID again supported this effort, and provided technical assistance and funding.

The first draft of the NETS was presented to the public at the National Forum for Eco-tourism, Mountains, and Protected Areas, in October of 2002, in Sofia. Forum discussions and a special session of the Working Group with representatives of the most prominent international organizations involved in eco-tourism (the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the World Tourism Organization (WTO), The International Eco-tourism Society (TIES), International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), European Council, and PAN Parks) contributed substantially to the second draft of the NETS.

The second draft of the Strategy was presented at the National Eco-tourism Workshop in February 2003. More than 150 participants, including representatives of seven ministries, the Parliamentary Commission of Environment and Waters, protected areas managers, national tourism organizations, national and regional associations of the municipalities, non-governmental organizations, regional and local tourism associations, national and international donors and their programs representatives, commercial banks, private entrepreneurs, educational and academic institutions, regional governors, and local government mayors, attended. The current NETS reflects the comments of these participants and written comments submitted after the Workshop.

International experts have said repeatedly that the Bulgarian National Eco-tourism Strategy process is an outstanding case of inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral cooperation. Both the NETS and the process used in its development set important precedents in the field of international eco-tourism and sustainable tourism development. Prime Minister Simeon Saxe Coburg-Gotha emphasized Bulgaria's leadership role in his opening remarks at the National Forum on Eco-tourism, Mountains and Protected Areas:

“We are convinced that by committing ourselves to support the development of eco-tourism, the Bulgarian government is making another strategic step towards the country's economic prosperity and its accession to the European Union. A well-preserved natural heritage and opportunities for development of nature-based tourism are positive values. Bulgaria can lead the way in making this contribution to the European value system.”

2. Eco-tourism and Bulgaria – An Overview

2.1 Resource Diversity

2.1.1 Biodiversity Conservation, Protected Areas, and the National Ecological Network

Bulgaria supports some of the richest biodiversity in all of Europe. Geographically, Bulgaria belongs to the paleo-arctic zone and lies at a cross-point between the Euro-Siberian, Irano-Turanian and Mediterranean sub-zones. Bulgaria hosts 29,000 species including 94 species of mammals, 405 species of birds, 36 species of reptiles, 16 species of amphibians, 207 species of marine and fresh-water fishes, and well over 27,000 species of insects and other invertebrates. Some of the most significant habitat in all of Europe for the brown bear, wolf and the Balkan chamois are found in Bulgaria. Other large mammals found in Bulgaria include the red deer, fallow deer, roe, mouflon, wild boar, jackal, and fox. The country also has a rich diversity of small mammals.

Over 80% of all bird species inhabiting the European continent can be seen in Bulgaria. This is due primarily to the presence of two major migratory routes that cross Bulgaria, the Via Pontica and Via Aristoteles. The wetlands along the Black Sea coast and the Danube River are significant bird habitats, along with the rich and favorable nesting conditions in the inner parts of the country. Suitable bird-watching spots can be found along the Bulgarian banks of the Danube, in the coastal zone, particularly the protected areas around Lake Atanassovsko, and at Kaliakra, Poda, Durankulak, and Shabla Lakes. Other sites are found in the Shumensko Plateau Nature Park, the Sinite Kamani Nature Park, near the town of Madjarovo in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains, and the Upper and Lower Topchia Strict reserves by the Tundja River.

About one-third of Bulgaria's territory is covered by forests and there are 359 known species of trees and shrubs that grow in the country. Bulgaria belongs to the deciduous, seasonal forest zone, dominated by oak and beech. There are also 3,500 species of higher vascular seed plants in Bulgaria and over 6,500 species of lower plants and mushrooms, including some 200 types of edible mushrooms. There are more than 750 medicinal plants, 250 of which are used in everyday practice. The richest diversity of plant species is found in the mountains of Bulgaria.

Protected Areas Network

The protected areas network in Bulgaria enhances the conservation and preservation of nature. Based on the World Conservation Union's categories of protected areas, Bulgaria's network includes strict reserve (IUCN category I); national park (category II); natural landmark (category III); maintained reserve (category IV and/or V), and protected locality (category IV and/or V).

Bulgaria has three National Parks: Rila, Pirin and Central Balkan. It also has 10 nature parks: Vitosha, Vrachanski Balkan, Shumensko Plateau, Sinite Kamani, Rila Monastery, Russenski Lom, Zlatni Piasatsi, Strandja, Persina, and Bulgarka. There are 90 designated reserves, including 17 biosphere reserves and 35 maintained reserves, as well as 175 protected localities and 457 natural landmarks.

Bulgaria's protected areas network covers 541,680 hectares, or 4.9% of the country's total territory. Twenty-two sites within this network are of international importance. There are two sites on UNESCO's World Natural and Cultural Heritage List: Pirin National Park and the Srebarna Biosphere Reserve. There are five wetland areas under the RAMSAR Convention: Arkutino, Atanassovsko Lake, Shabla Lake, Durankulak Lake, and Srebarna Lake.

National Ecological Network

The objectives of the National Ecological Network is regulated by Bulgaria's Biodiversity Law are:

- Conservation through the integration of high priority nature protection sites in a comprehensive network, including endangered species areas, representative ecosystems, and typical sections of major habitat and landscape types
- Long-term conservation of all typical Bulgarian ecosystems, habitats and landscapes and their natural internal connection
- Provision of sufficient area of suitable quality for breeding, feeding, hibernation and migratory resting spots for wild animals
- Provision of sufficient space for species to move about and to interact and exchange genetic material
- Creation of better living environment and benefits to the local community through nature oriented activities and the achievement of sustainable nature protection

Bulgaria's National Ecological Network gives highest priority to the following:

- Protected zones, some of which might include protected areas
- Existing protected areas and their buffer zones
- Territories of high importance for species diversity
- Territories of high importance for rare taxones
- Territories with high endemism
- CORINE and RAMSAR sites
- Sites of ornithological importance
- Migration corridors
- Landscape connecting elements

The National Ecological Network is under development in Bulgaria and will be Bulgaria's commitment to the European Network NATURA 2000. This is the most important step Bulgaria will make in meeting the requirements of the European Union (EU) Directive for Habitats and the Directive for Birds. These are important conditions for Bulgaria's accession to the EU.

2.1.2 Climatic Resources

Situated in temperate latitudes, Bulgaria has temperate continental climate throughout most of the country. Its southern parts and the Black Sea Coast experience continental Mediterranean climate. The main feature of Bulgaria's climate is its diversity, a consequence of the country's transitional geographic location (situated between temperate and sub-tropic latitudes) and its varied topography of mountains of different heights, plains and hills, lowlands and valley. Thus abnormal climate situations characteristic of arctic to tropical regions, can be observed in the country. The bio-climatic diversity of Bulgaria, combined with comfortable thermal conditions, is conducive for eco-tourism activities.

2.1.3 Water Resources

Bulgaria's water resources are estimated to be 15-20 billion cubic meters per year, ranging from less than 10 billion cubic meters during very dry years to over 30 billion cubic meters in very wet years. Water distribution throughout the year and throughout the country is very uneven, and therefore it is artificially regulated. The country's water resources satisfy to a great degree the water supply needs in the inhabited areas, including tourist sites. Water is an important natural resource for tourism. People like to visit attractive water sites, and water resources satisfy particular needs, such as water for drinking, balneology, and enjoying water-related sports. Sea, rivers, lakes, swamps, springs, geysers, and waterfalls are all found in Bulgaria.

The Black Sea is an important traditional mass tourism destination and holiday destination for Bulgarians, as well as tourists from other countries. Opportunities for eco-tourism include bird watching in several wetlands along the Black sea coast. The river network in the country consists of more than 1200 rivers, from tributaries to main rivers, with a total length of approximately 20 000 kilometers (km); however only 30 rivers are longer than 100 km. The 470 km long Bulgarian section of the Danube River has special cultural importance. There are very few organized tourism activities along Bulgarian rivers, such as boat cruises in the deltas of the small rivers emptying into the Black Sea.

There are 400 lakes in Bulgaria with a total surface area of about 95 sq. km. There are three main lake types – high mountain, sea and river lakes. More than 330 high mountain glacier lakes are situated in the various cirques in the alpine parts of Rila and Pirin National Parks. Visitors are attracted to their crystal clear waters. The most famous lakes in Rila National Park are: the Seven Rila Lakes, Mussalenski, Urdini, Ribni, and Popovi, Banderishki, Vassilishki, Vlahinski in Pirin National Park.

While there are fewer sea lakes (firths and lagoons), they have a greater surface areas than the mountain lakes. From north to south along the coast are: Durankulak Lake, Shabla Lake, Varna Lake, Beloslav Lake, Pomorie Lake, Atanassovsko Lake, Burgas Lake, and Mandra Lake. The most famous river lake is Srebarna along the Danube, which is a biosphere reserve. There are many other small lakes in the floodplains of the Iskar, Kamchia, Ropotamo, Tundja, and Maritsa rivers. Other attractive tourist sites are the 2000-plus artificial lakes. They are of great local importance as traditional destinations for domestic tourism, and are used for conservation purposes and bird watching.

There are a limited number of waterfalls in the country and most are in protected areas. Tourists are attracted to Raikoto Praskalo in the Central Balkan National Par, the most famous one, and to Skakavitsa in Rila National Park. The various spa and high- volume karst springs are important for eco-tourism development. These include Kleptuza, Lakatnishki, Glava Panega and Devnenski. There are 525 mineral water deposits in the country and 1600 mineral springs (natural and drilled) with a total debit of 4900 liters/second. This enormous wealth of mineral waters is a precondition for the development of various balneological centers of national and international significance. Famous spa resorts include Sandanski, Hissarya, Pavel Banya, Velingrad, and Narechenski Bani.

2.1.4 Landscape Diversity

While Bulgaria covers only 1.06% of the landmass of Europe, it is rich in diversified landscapes. According to the European Convention for the Landscape, signed by Bulgaria in 2000, the landscape is a visually perceptible area whose appearance results from the action and interaction of nature and/or human factors. The landscape provides an environmental, cultural and aesthetic framework, with scenery attractive for eco-tourism. The landscape is important to satisfying the most significant demands of consumers of eco-tourism services.

There are two types of landscape – natural and anthropogenic-created by people. There are also transitional types, depending on the level of human intervention. Certain groups of landscapes are defined as cultural landscapes because of the significant human intervention that shaped them. Cultural landscapes reflect the historical development of human society and communities.

Bulgaria has a diverse landscape because of its relief, varying from within 0 meters in altitude in the coastal plain to 2,925 meters at the peak of Mussala, in Rila National Park. The country's landscape is characterized by various morphographic units, i.e. mountains of different heights, hills and valleys, plains and lowlands. The great wealth of the high mountains is their snowy slopes and watersheds, suitable for winter sports. The rest of the mountains are attractive for their variety of rock formations, both at the surface and underground. Typical elements of the mountain landscape are waters alternating with wide meadows and pastures, as well as streams, rivers, lakes, and waterfalls, many of which are tourist attractions. Hilly plains enhance the country's landscape diversity. The form and space of relief include interesting nature tourist sites and unique habitats for flora and fauna. Seaside landscapes are remarkable for their peculiar combination of all natural components.

The geological elements and exogenic factors add to the picturesque landscape, including beautiful rock phenomena such as Belogradchik Rocks, Melnik Pyramids, Pobitite Kamani near Varna, and the stone Bridges in the Rhodopes. There are many karst formations and the most remarkable are the caves dispersed all over Bulgaria. A large number have been studied and seven have been electrified. Some of the most famous Bulgarian caves are located in the West Stara Planina, Saeva Dupka and Bacho Kiro in the Middle Stara Planina, and Yagodina Cave and Dyavolsko Garlo in the Rhodopes.

At present, tourism in Bulgaria is focused predominantly on two types of landscape, the Black Sea and mountain ski areas. Eco-tourism offers opportunities to diversify tourist experiences into other landscapes. Currently, there is primarily a domestic market for these eco-tourism experiences.

2.1.5 Cultural and Historical Heritage

Bulgaria has an exceptionally rich cultural and historical heritage accumulated throughout the centuries through a genuine mixture of cultures. The most valuable have been given the legal protective status of Cultural Monument, a designation under the Cultural Monuments and Museums Act (CMMA). Cultural monuments are classified according to their authenticity and degree of preservation, scientific and artistic value, and interaction with the environment and the community as a whole. Two main types of Cultural Monuments (CM), mobile and immobile, can be designated under the CMMA.

There are a total of 39,443 immobile cultural and historical heritage sites designated as Cultural Monuments of particular interest for the NETS. They represent authentic material evidence of human existence and activity that are inseparable from the environment in which, or for which, each has been created. Various classification features define the diversity of immobile cultural heritage sites including their:

- historical age they belong to: pre-historical, antique, Medieval, Renaissance, New Age
- area and structure: single sites and grouped sites (176) – ensembles, complexes, historical settlements and historical zones
- scientific and cultural significance: archeological sites (15,482, of which 10,000 are mounds), historical (2,624), architectural and constructional (19,522), artistic (1,763), man made park and gardening design (52), urban sites and cultural landscape, ethnographic, production and industrial-technological sites
- location with respect to settlement structures – in or outside the settlement
- cultural and historical value

Cultural Monuments have been classified into the following categories: “world importance” (7), “national importance” (11,367), “local significance” (6,931), “ensemble significance” and “for reference” (2,401). There are two steps in the procedure for registering an immobile CM under the CMMA. The first is a temporary declaration of protection status after which the CM is formally announced. There are 18,744 declared and 20,699 announced CM in Bulgaria.

The regulatory protection of CMs envisages special regimes for their protection including: the scope of their area, principally the immediate area surrounding the CM and instructions for their preservation. The designation of a CM area represents a special type of “protected area” with cultural and historical heritage significance, corresponding to the natural environment areas of the National Ecological Network. A special regime, a reserve, can be established for grouped CMs that fall within the “national significance” category. A total of 44 reserves have been formally announced to date.

The network of cultural and historical heritage sites is dense and rather disperse, with high typological diversity, complex historical stratification, proclaimed continuity, and in organic relation with nature. These characteristics are relevant to the development of eco-tourism. It is the common ground of eco-tourism and cultural tourism and reflects the identity of Bulgarian natural and cultural heritage as a resource for tourism. Often the natural area is the natural environment of a cultural monument, which is why Bulgarian law protects it. For example, the natural environment of Rila Monastery is under a special conservation regime – the Rila Holy Monastery Reserve. It is also protected by the Cultural Monuments and Museums Act and has been designated as a Nature Park, in accordance with Bulgaria’s Protected Areas Act. The Reserve and the Nature Park encompass the same area and are protected under two separate Bulgarian laws. This is similar to the Rock Churches cultural and historical reserve near the village of Ivanovo, and the medieval town Cherven and surrounding areas, which are integral parts of the Russenski Lom Nature Park.

The CM itself can be a synthesis of the natural environment and traditional human intervention, for example cultural landscape sites with specific land uses like the Rose Valley, or sites of park and gardening design, such as the Boris Garden in Sofia. The CM can be a preserved natural environment with cultural and historical importance associated with significant historical events and personalities, such as the Shipka – Buzludja Park Museum cultural and historical reserve.

Mobile cultural and historical heritage resources under the protection of Cultural Monuments and Museums Act are important for NETS, as well as the 5 million exhibits that are preserved in a network of 330 museums and galleries. Some of these mobile resources of conservation value come from the natural environment important for eco-tourism.

The content of the term “cultural heritage” is constantly expanding and changing. New types of values are recognized. The concept of a complex “cultural environment” is being developed. It includes sites of cultural and historical heritage defined and regulated by the current law, as well as new types of traditional values that have not been protected to date, but are part of the anthropogenic component of the landscape. These include:

Traditional culture of land-use and agricultural practices preserving the land and protecting the genetic and cultural integrity of valuable species and landscapes

For almost five thousand years, human civilization has been establishing its imprint on the Bulgarian landscape. These patterns have been captured in the large areas of intact ecosystems found in the country. Landscapes have developed reflecting the activities of humans, and still have left many natural areas and resources intact. This important combination of traditional land use and natural resource conservation is a distinctive feature of Bulgaria. The combinations of traditional land use, sustainable agricultural practices, and human cultural and social organization have resulted in a land-use ethic that is quickly being lost throughout Europe. Bulgarian traditions and land use ethics are best preserved in the mountains and surrounding regions of Stara Planina, Pirin, Rila, the Rhodopes, and Strandja.

Bulgaria’s land use ethic is often disparaged as being backwards. Instead of backwards, the land use system of much of the country is based upon strong rural principles of hard work, local agriculture and horticulture with little pesticide and mechanization, and a strong affinity with the land and the natural resources on it. Bulgaria’s land husbandry distinguishes it from many European countries in that there is still so much local competence and self-sufficiency in the production of agricultural goods based on sound land management, pride of production, and the preservation of traditional food production practices. These can be witnessed throughout the country in the wine varieties that grown here, in the production of garden vegetables, herbs and fruits, and in the practices surrounding medicinal plants. Many of these practices still preserve local and ancient cultivars of modern crop forms, and represent an important bank of genetic material for the future of agriculture and biodiversity.

Bulgarian lands are traditionally connected with wine growing and wine production. Unique types of Bulgarian grapes and wines have been preserved. Over 3 000 sorts of vines are grown in Bulgaria. Sandanski and Melnik, Pomorie, Suhindol, Varna, Sungurlare and Karlovo are famous vineyards. Osmar wormwood wine (bittersweet in taste) is very famous. The production of brandy (rakia) is traditional for Bulgaria. This traditional Bulgarian drink is produced in all regions of the country, but the most valued grape brandies are grown in the regions of Evksinovgrad, Pomorie, Sliven, Russe, and Burgas, and in plum brandy in Troyan.

Different ethereal and oil crops are grown as well, primarily roses and lavender. The famous rose oil, used in top quality cosmetic products of the European perfumery industry, is produced in the Valley of Roses located between Stara Planina and Sredna Gora. Bulgaria is a traditional producer of fruits and vegetables, and each region has its own conditions and typical crops. Unfortunately some of the rare and specific fruit and vegetable varieties, for

example Bulgarian apple varieties have gradually vanished and been replaced by standard and popular types. Bulgaria has been losing other indigenous plant types.

Production of cereals is also part of Bulgaria's traditional agricultural production. The Danube plains and Dobrudja in particular, are known as the Granary of Bulgaria, while the Plovdiv valley and Sandanski-Petrich valley are famous for their vegetable and fruit gardens. The southern mountains of Bulgaria are centers for the production of tobacco and potatoes. Bulgarian yogurt and white, brined cheese are products that have been steadily associated with the image of Bulgaria throughout the world.

In addition to agricultural crops there are also traditional activities based on forest resources and natural plant collection. Bulgarian herbs are famous for their composition and healing effects. Mushroom collecting is part of the livelihood of people in the mountain areas, and Bulgaria is Europe's number one exporter of wild mushrooms, fruits and herbs.

The widespread local practice of preparing homemade food preserves for winter supplies has almost turned into a culinary art. Local fruits are used to prepare stewed fruits, jams, dried fruits, and molasses. Vegetable pickles are quite diverse in taste and composition. The same applies to the preparation of different brands of pepper relish (lutenitsa) and eggplant and pepper purees (kyopulou) in different regions of the country. The variety and richness of the Bulgarian traditional kitchen has developed on the basis of local agricultural and dairy products, and the adoption of diverse oriental influences. Often one and the same dish is prepared in a number of ways throughout the country, using different recipes.

Social events and traditions, ethnographic and folklore values, evidence of customs, crafts and skills, traditions, and beliefs that are usually inseparable elements of the natural environment

Traditional livelihoods and techniques for land cultivation, combined with pagan and Christian traditions have contributed to an exceptionally rich Bulgarian folklore. In addition to national holidays, festivities and popular fairs, the Bulgarian calendar is dotted with year-round local and regional holidays, each one with its own specificity and color. There have always been a great variety of traditional folklore art crafts in Bulgaria, such as woodcarving, pottery, textile, and copper working. Local practices, for example local construction schools, contribute to the regional identity of areas. The Society of Masters of Folklore Arts and Crafts plays a significant role in their preservation.

More and more spectators experience the magic of Bulgarian folklore presented at traditional popular festivals in Koprivshtitsa, Rojen, and Predela. There are a number of festivals in the country devoted to local authentic folklore art, including the annual festival in Burgas each August, the Festival of Roses in Kazanluk each year in early June, the Folklore Festival in Koprivshtitsa held every five years, and the International Festival of Kukeri (masked dances) and masquerade games in Pernik, held in January every other year.

Cultural practices and cultural events, diverse manifests of live culture, some of which are traditional and cyclic cultural events

Art lovers can enjoy the rich cultural calendar of Bulgaria and visit prestigious international theatrical performances, movies, opera, ballet, painting, symphony performances, and concerts of world known musicians and musical groups. A new synthetic type of cultural heritage called, “cultural itinerary”, is of particular interest now. It is a thematic combination of all of the above-mentioned types of cultural heritage into a single historical axis. These might be at different levels: local, for example the Road of the Botev revolutionary group, national, such as the national network of antique and medieval roads and values, and regional transborder, such as the Balkan roads of the East Orthodox Monkshood.

All forms of cultural heritage in the broadest sense are serious prerequisites for the development of diverse and specific tourism products that can be offered throughout the year, at the national and local level. These are associated with another specific form of tourism, cultural tourism, defined as responsible travel motivated by cultural and historical heritage, and diversity in live culture. Similar to eco-tourism, cultural tourism is based on sustainable development, using and conserving existing cultural and historical resources.

In recent years cultural tourism has developed as one of the most successful industries in a number of countries throughout the world. According to international research, people’s interest in culture appears to be one of the main motivating factors for tourist travels in the world. Cultural itineraries are important parts of the infrastructure of cultural tourism at all levels. A European network of cultural itineraries is developing as a priority program for the Council of Europe and of European Institute for Cultural Itineraries. One of the strategic goals of NETS is to connect Bulgarian natural, cultural and historical heritage to this broader European network.

Eco-tourism and cultural tourism utilize specific parts of the environment rich in natural and cultural heritage areas. In some instances they are integral areas characterized by both biological diversity and valuable cultural and historical heritage. The synthesis of natural and cultural heritage is an important Bulgarian phenomenon.

2.2 Policy Framework

The following review indicates that while Bulgaria’s current strategic and political documents do not contain specific provisions for eco-tourism, they create a favorable political environment for the development of eco-tourism.

2.2.1 National Strategies and Action Plans

National Environmental Strategy and National Action Plan for 2000-2006

The National Environmental Strategy establishes the policies of the Ministry of Environment and Water. It presents a vision for developing national environmental policy and formulating national long-term priorities. One long-term national strategic objective is to improve the quality of life of Bulgarian citizens by creating a favorable environment and conserving the rich natural resources based on sustainable environmental management. The Strategy also outlines intersectoral tools for implementing the environmental policy, such as environmental

impact assessment (EIA), environmental audits and permits, the institutional organization, legislation, public information and participation, European integration and international cooperation, and financing environmental protection activities. Most of these tools can be applied to eco-tourism projects as well.

The National Action Plan was developed to help ensure successful implementation of the objectives set forth in the National Environmental Strategy. The Plan outlines activities, responsible institutions, and the necessary funding and potential sources of funding. It also identifies expected results. The Plan devotes a special section to tourism development, in which priority areas for development and the development and implementation of management plans for protected areas of significant tourist interest discussed.

National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy (1994)

This National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy (NBDCS) defines eco-tourism as a tool for biodiversity conservation and a source of opportunity for developing the Bulgarian economy, based on the natural, cultural and historic wealth of the country. In 1994, Bulgaria was already defining a sustainable development agenda that used eco-tourism as a tool for its realization. Eco-tourism is seen as bring prosperity to local communities, together with stimulating the society's interest in tourism and nature conservation. The Strategy noted that eco-tourism should be integrated in the process of regional and municipal planning, and in environmental assessments and educational environmental programs.

The National Biological Diversity Conservation Strategy defines eco-tourism as an area of high priority and recommends that a clear national policy on eco-tourism and an action plan for its development is done. In addition it recommends approaches that specifically identify key eco-tourism resource areas using an analysis of existing environmental and cultural resources, environmental pressure points, and sensitive areas of high conservation and aesthetic value. It encourages strong links between the private sector, with key parties in nature conservation, NGOs and educators, in order to realize eco-tourism goals.

National Biological Diversity Conservation Plan (1999-2003)

This five-year action plan was developed as a result of the adoption of the National Strategy in 1998. The Action Plan does not touch widely on the development of ecotourism as a biodiversity conservation tool, nor does it focus to any degree on the role of ecotourism as a partnership opportunity between protected areas and surrounding communities. Instead, the Action Plan largely focuses on the important priority of legislative reform, new legislation development for medicinal plants and biodiversity conservation, and the development of a national ecological network. The latter is an important contribution to Bulgarian efforts for sustainable development. The Network is designed to integrate into a coherent complex the most important areas for nature protection that include the national protected areas network and other vital areas in the country. The Network is the stepping tool for complex land use planning, and is part of the private and public efforts towards sustainable development.

The Action Plan also points out the important set of tools needed in preserving biological diversity in the country, as it refers to projects that support forms of sustainable tourism, preservation of indigenous plant and animal breeds, and the development of demonstration farms for sustainable eco-agriculture.

The Strategy for Water Management in the Republic of Bulgaria (1997)

The Strategy for Water Management was developed in 1997. It presents the argumentation for water management reforms, and at the same time provides grounds for the changes in Bulgarian and European water management legislation. A great percentage of the necessary legislative amendment has already taken place with the Water Act and its subsidiary regulations.

Important aspects of the Water Management Strategy is the water basin management approach, which practically introduces the principles of decentralized water management on regional levels – through regional watershed management bodies. These principles coincide with the general landscape approach that devolves authority for development and implementation of sustainable development agendas to local and regional levels.

Cultural Tourism Development Strategy

In 2002, the Ministry of Culture distributed a draft of the Cultural Tourism Development Strategy (CTDS) for discussion. It includes provisions for coordinating the activities of NETS and CTDS. The CTDS outlines the potential for social and economic development from Bulgarian cultural heritage. It emphasizes the contribution of cultural tourism to conserving cultural and historic heritage and developing modern art and culture activities. The CTDS defines cultural tourism principles and strategic objectives, consistent with the ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Tourism. The CTDS identifies the role and activities of the Ministry of Culture in promoting cultural tourism. Implementation of the cultural tourism strategy includes the participation of all partners at national, regional and municipal level.

National Strategy for the Promotion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) Development for the period 2002-2006

The draft National Strategy for the Promotion of SMEs Development for the period 2002-2006 outlines issues relevant to small and medium-sized enterprises. The objectives of the Strategy are to create and develop effective market conditions and favorable institutional, legislative, administrative, financial and competitive environments for SMEs development in Bulgaria. These objectives are supported by six sub-objectives: free competition, job creation, development of hi-tech industries, development of managerial skills, promotion of small export companies, and an increase in investments in the SMEs sector. Achieving these objectives is particularly important to developing eco-tourism, since the primary investment in eco-tourism is made by small family businesses.

The draft Strategy defines seven strategic priorities necessary for sustainable development and a real growth in small and medium-sized enterprises. They can be grouped in four areas of public impact:

- Establishing a favorable environment for SMEs by simplifying the administrative environment for SMEs and creating conditions for regional SMEs development
- Improving the financial environment, access to information and services and encouraging entrepreneurial spirit and skills
- Stimulating the market
- Supporting technological innovation and integration of SMEs in the information society.

National Forest Policy and Strategy

In October 2002 the Bulgarian Government began formulating the National Forest Policy and Strategy (NFPS). This is a major initiative and includes contributions from experts, representatives of various stakeholders and society at large. The Strategy will provide the framework for all important decisions concerning forestry into the next 10 years. The Strategy addresses both forestry and forestry-related industries, including timber processing and the furniture industry. The NFPS is based on three basic principles:

- 1) Sustainability - Bulgarian forests should positively contribute to sustainable development and meet the adopted international standards for sustainable forestry management
- 2) Broad public participation - forests are part of the national wealth and belong to Bulgarian society. The forestry sector should involve the general public in all its activities and general forestry management should be based on public support
- 3) Quality of life - forests should positively contribute to improving the quality of life of the country's population. This may take a social, economic or even ecological form, stressing the importance of the non-market benefits from forests.

The draft NFPS highlights the great potential Bulgarian forests have in the development of tourism and recreation activities, as well as the major problems and challenges. One of the strategic objectives is the integration of the tourism business in traditional forest management activities. Two major strategic actions to achieve this objective are:

- Identify and increase investments contributing to eco-tourism, including cooperation with tourist agencies, training, advertising, and infrastructure development
- Identify and analyze tourist resources at the local and regional level.

National Regional Development Plan 2000 - 2006

The National Regional Development Plan is a main instrument, forming the overall, long-term oriented and resources provided regional development policy, based on the balance of the national, regional, and local priorities and interests. The necessity of such policy is determined due to, the regional divergences bring social, political and economical issues, since the national economy is strongly dependable by its regional components and the market forces only cannot provide balanced regional development. On other behalf, it is a response to the requirements for the European Union joining of Bulgaria, in the field of the regional policy and the social-economic joining, and the opportunities to use the pre-accession instruments of the European Union.

The National Regional Development Plan is closely linked to the National Economic Development Plan, prepared within the Special Preparatory Program for the Structural funds of the European Union in Bulgaria. The Regional Development Law regulates this link. These are coordinated regarding their objectives, the strategy and the priorities, implemented within. The proposals, included in the National Economic Development Plan (an in particular, in its section, dedicated to the balanced and sustainable regional development), which are part of the envisaged by the National Regional Development Plan activities, is possible the seeking financing form the pre-accession EU instruments. The National Regional Development Plan and the section for regional development of the National Economic Development Plan are compatible, regarding the envisaged measures, but differ in range, including territorial.

The decentralization of the management means a distribution of responsibilities and obligations for the results by the local level management – where the real economic and social processes take place. The local government reform has the objective to provide preconditions for the transition to decentralized management. It includes a real increase of the civic participation and democratization of the decision-making processes. The decentralization of the funding is a mechanism for the provision of independence and the self-management of the municipalities.

2.2.2 Legal Framework

In general, the existing national legislative framework establishes the political conditions for the development of eco-tourism. There are several legal acts that reference the development of eco-tourism.

Tourism Act (2002)

The Act provides for the organization and management of tourism in Bulgaria. It focuses on:

1. Creating conditions to develop tourism as a priority branch of the economy
2. Introducing common criteria for evaluating the quality of tourist activities
3. Providing for consumer protection
4. Determining the rights and obligations of persons dealing with tourism
5. Regulating the control of tourist activities.

The Act regulates tourism as a combination of specific economic activities: tours, participation in cultural events, forums and other events organized with the purpose of developing, supplying and realizing goods and services from the tourist product. The Act recognizes national parks, nature parks, reserves, protected areas, and natural sights under the Protected Areas Act as tourist destinations. It also recognizes museums, reserves, and Cultural Monuments under the Cultural Monuments and Museums Act, as well as the cultural institutes under the Culture Protection and Development Act. The Act provides the tools used to implement government policy, to support tourism management authorities at various levels, to provide financial support of tourism, and the conditions and procedures for tourist activity. While eco-tourism and cultural tourism are included as types of tourism, the Act does not specifically provide for the development of eco-tourism or small and medium-sized enterprise businesses.

Environmental Protection Act (2002)

The Environmental Protection Act specified the rights and responsibilities of the state, municipalities, legal entities and individuals regarding environmental protection. It addresses the collection and distribution of information on the condition of environment; controls on the environment and requirements for the preparation of environmental impact assessments for certain sites and activities. The Act does not address eco-tourism, but it does address ?c?-labelling and certification.

Biodiversity Act (2002)

This Act addresses the conservation and use of biodiversity, conservation of natural habitats and species, ecological systems and processes, the conservation of genetic resources, and specific issues associated with forms of conservation and trade in endangered species. The Act does not directly refer to eco-tourism, but does regulate the management of the National Environmental Network, which includes certain sites that will form a part of the eco-tourist network.

Protected Areas Act (1998)

The Protected Areas Act regulates categories of protected areas, their management, security, and funding. The main objectives of the protected area system are the conservation of nature and biodiversity, ecosystems and their natural processes, species populations and habitats, and features of an abiotic nature and the landscape. Protected areas management plans devote a special place to the development of sustainable forms of livelihood within and around the protected areas, and the establishment of environmentally friendly activities.

The goal is to create conditions for economic prosperity for local people, based on their close access to protected areas and conserved nature. The development of alternative forms of tourism is promoted through visitors' services, itineraries, tourist and information infrastructure, safeguarding, and opportunities for the development of small and medium-sized private businesses that will offer tourist services and associated specialized services. There are no particular mechanisms to regulate the relationship between the protected area administration, eco-tourist suppliers, and potential investors in eco-tourist infrastructure in the protected areas.

Forestry Act (1997)

The Forestry Act provides for the management, reproduction, use and conservation of the forests of Bulgaria. The main functions of the forests are seen as the formation of the environment, environmental protection, and public recreation. These functions define the maintenance and management goals identified in forestry management planning documents. Sustainability is a basic principle for managing the multifunctional use of forests. The Act recognizes that forest uses should not damage biological populations and habitat nor exhaust these resources. Activities that may cause abrupt changes to the environment are not allowed within protected forests and forests used for recreation purposes. Forests and lands from the forestry fund provide a foundation for the development of tourist activities and alternative forms of tourism, particularly eco-tourism.

Cultural Monuments and Museums Act (1969)

The Act and its subsidiary regulations define the legal regime for conserving mobile and immobile cultural monuments. It also provides for the investigation, research, registration, conservation and popularization of cultural monuments (CM); identifies types of CM and protected areas, reserves, and the responsibilities and obligations of the central institutes, local authorities and CM holders. The Act does not address cultural tourism but does regulate the requirements for the use and management of CM. Cultural Monuments with the status of a reserve are subject to special regulations that include rules for coordinated research, conservation, and management. The law provides for a fully centralized management of cultural and historical sites, which does not allow local authorities to become partners in conserving and managing Bulgaria's cultural heritage. A large part of the regulations are outdated, and a new draft of the Cultural Monuments and Museums Act is pending in the Parliament.

Culture Protection and Development Act (1999)

This Act defines the general principles and priorities of national policy, cultural organizations and cultural protection authorities. The Act provides for establishing national and municipal Culture Funds that accumulate funds from various sources. These funds are then allocated to

support Bulgarian culture, including conservation and popularization of cultural and historic heritage. The Act does not regard Cultural Monuments as tourist sites and has no provisions for collecting fees.

Territorial Planning Act (2001)

The Act regulates the use of real estate in different areas: urban, agricultural, forest, protected-for environmental protection and conservation of cultural heritage, and the recovery and recultivation of damaged lands. It delineates a system of territorial plans as a regional management tool to protect and develop the territories. Regulations for territorial and urban protection include territories with special territorial and urban protection under the Protected Areas Act and the Cultural Monuments and Museums Act. Territories that are have preventive territorial protection and cultural and historic areas are subject to special rules and regulations.

Regional Development Act (1999)

In March 1999, the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted the Regional Development Act (SG, # 26 of 1999) that regulates the regional development management bodies, the planning documents type, contents, and preparation terms, as well as the funding. In accordance with this Act, the government set the criteria for defining the targeted impact regions and their territorial scope and adopted the Regulation on the Organization and Activity of the Regional Development Council with the Council of Ministers and similar regulations for the district councils for regional development.

The Act provides the legislative basis for decentralization of the local government and creates preconditions for economic development of municipalities, based upon the priorities they have identified.

Agricultural Lands Property and Use Act (1991)

The Act outlines the rights of owners of agricultural lands in the territory in which and under which there are inseparable archeological sites and cultural monuments. It outlines the obligations of owners and users with regard to the conservation of CMs. The law does not make any provisions for tourism and eco-tourism development, nor for biodiversity conservation on agricultural lands. The Act does not contain provisions to establish sites as part the National Ecological Network or to protect and use landscapes.

2.2.3 International Conventions and Agreements

Bulgaria subscribes to 26 international conventions and bilateral agreements. Eleven relate to the development of eco-tourism in Bulgaria. Seven of the conventions deal directly with environmental protection:

- International Convention for Plant Protection, effective for Bulgaria since 1933
- Convention for Environmental Impact Assessment in Trans-Border Context, effective since 1977
- UN Convention for Bio-diversity, ratified by Bulgaria in 1996
- RAMSAR Convention 1975
- Bern Convention 1991
- Bonn Convention 1999
- Washington Convention 1991

Two agreements directly relate to the conservation of various kinds of cultural and historic heritage:

- Convention for the Protection of Architectural Heritage of Europe, 1985
- European Convention for Protection of Architectural Heritage, 1992

These Conventions include localities as protected sites that are established through the joint efforts of people and nature and are of significant historic, archeological, artistic, scientific, social and technical interest. The Conventions introduce the term “integrated conservation”, which encompasses the conservation of cultural heritage, archeological investigations and related culture policies, and environmental and territorial planning. The concept of coordinating cultural and environmental management and protection is included in other international documents Bulgaria has officially adopted including the ICOMOS International Charter on Cultural Tourism and the Nara Document for Authenticity, which defines key requirements for the conservation of cultural heritage authenticity.

The Convention for the Protection of the World’s Cultural and Natural Heritage, Paris, 1972 defines the terms “cultural heritage” and “natural heritage”. It outlines the obligations of the states to conserve the most valuable sites in these two categories that possess an “internal inherent exclusive universal value. In 1972 Bulgaria signed, but has yet to ratify, the European Convention for the Landscape, which is directly linked to eco-tourism and cultural tourism. It regulates the obligations of state and local authorities for the conservation, management and design of various types of landscapes, the role of public participation, and international cooperation in these efforts. It is important that Bulgarian landscapes be considered as an integral part of the European landscape and be nominated for European status, i.e. the Council of Europe Award for Landscape.

International agreements and conventions do not imply absolute and explicit exclusion of economic activities from protected areas, national parks and other natural sites, museums and cultural monuments. There are no international regulations that could prevail over national legislation. They do provide opportunities for effective combination of biodiversity conservation and cultural and historic heritage for economic growth and development in Bulgaria.

2.3 Stakeholders

2.3.1 Government

The State, through its central authorities and consistent with its constitutional rights and obligations, stimulates and supports the development of all economic activities including tourism. The role it plays in the development of eco-tourism is to:

- Place a priority on tourism development and identify the role of eco-tourism
- Adopt appropriate legislation
- Mobilize available resources and attract new investments and development
- Establish mechanisms for permanent and stable guarantees for incomes and fundraising
- Contribute to a publicity campaign in the country and abroad
- Help establish and maintain the necessary infrastructure and information systems
- Provide needed information

Several ministries are directly involved in developing eco-tourism in Bulgaria and some have specific responsibilities and roles in its development. One coordinating mechanism is the protocol agreement for cooperation in the area of eco-tourism, signed in October 2002 between the Ministry of Environment and Water, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. However the agreement does not have a mechanism for practical implementation of this coordination, and there is no special body within the ministries or at an inter-institutional level that is committed to implementing the present strategy.

2.3.1.1 National Level

Ministry of Environment and Water

The MOEW is responsible for the supervision of all matters related to the natural environment and waters in the country. They are the supervisory body for water management and quality, environmental compliance, environmental quality monitoring, and environmental (impact) assessments. In addition, they supervise the national network of protected areas, and are responsible for new protected area designation. They must also ensure the development of management plans that guide investments and activities within the protected area system. In addition, the MOEW is responsible for supervising the development and compliance with the National Ecological Network and for compliance with all environmental conventions and treaties to which Bulgaria is a signatory. As one of the prime goals of nature conservation and the protected area legislation is to ensure benefits to local communities, the Ministry is a logical partner in the implementation of sustainable tourism and eco-tourism efforts in the country.

The Ministry of Environment and Water, implements much of their biodiversity conservation mandate through a system of regional offices (Regional Environmental Inspectorates and National Parks administrations). With the guidance of primary and secondary legislation, and protected area management plans, these teams also supervise the development of tourism in protected areas in the country. They have also started to embark on a program of support to community eco-tourism efforts around these parks.

The Environmental Management Activities Enterprise Fund is a budgetary fund of the Government of Bulgaria, administered through a public/private Board. It is the successor to the National Environmental Protection Fund and capitalized through environment fines, fees and taxes. It has a recent tradition of supporting the following activities, related to eco-tourism inside and outside of protected areas. 80% of their funds are however, dedicated to environmental protection activities at municipal level:

- Design of tourist sites and infrastructure;
- Developing information centres;
- Tourist and information infrastructure (roads, tour trails, boards and signs, places for recreation, views, parking areas);
- Promotion – leaflets, prospectus, films;
- Visitor Safety,
- Preservation of traditions, crafts and organization of celebrations, competitions, and exhibitions.

The Ministry of Environment and Water consists of several directorates; each of them specializes in particular environmental components. The Department of National Nature Protection Service (NNPS) coordinates the activities of eco-tourism within MEW. NNPS does not have a specialized unit yet addressing policy and programs in eco-tourism.

Ministry of Economy

The Ministry of Economy manages and coordinates a wide sector of the national economy – industry, commerce, international economic relations and tourism. The Ministry includes 21 directorates, three of which are designated to work in the area of tourism:

- National Tourism Policy Directorate
- Tourist Analysis and Forecast Directorate
- International Tourism Policy Directorate

A Deputy Minister oversees these three directorates and has tourism planning and policy responsibilities. However, there is no directorate or specialized staff for eco-tourism development. The Ministry of Economy:

- Develops strategy and short-term tourism development programs, including eco-tourism
- Coordinates the activities of ministries and institutions in the area of tourism
- Works with the Central Expert Commission on Licensing and Categorization, whose members include representatives of national tourist associations
- Issues licenses to tour operators and tour agencies, and categorizes tourist sites proposed by the Central Commission for Expert Licensing and Categorization
- Organizes and coordinates tourism management and quality control
- Organizes and maintains the national tourist register
- Organizes and manages the national tourism promotion campaign, and supports tourist associations in their promotional efforts in domestic and international markets
- Organizes the work of the National Tourist Board and approves their annual national advertising program
- Establishes, maintains and updates a unified tourist information system
- Controls the activities of the Commission on Trade and Consumer Protection and the National Tourism Advertising and Information Agency
- Contributes to and maintains tourism related infrastructure
- Works to attract foreign investment to implement projects in tourism development at the national, regional and local level
- Participates in international cooperative tourism efforts and represents Bulgaria on international tourist organizations
- Coordinates the development of joint training programs and the qualification of tourism staff, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
- Provides methodological assistance on tourism development to regional and local authorities, and tourist associations

The National Tourism Council (NTC) was established as a state public advisory and coordinating body within the Ministry of Economy, and is chaired by the Minister. NTC members include representatives of the state, tourist associations, associations of air, road and water carriers, consumer protection associations in Bulgaria, and the National Association of Municipalities.

The National Tourism Council:

1. Proposes to the Minister of Economy the annual program for allocation of funds for the state financial support to the tourism development;
2. Develops and adopts a program for national advertising in the area of tourism and submits it for approval by the Minister of Economy;

3. Coordinates the performance of the national promotion of tourism;
4. Adopts and submits for approval from the Minister of Economy the annual report of the Executive Director of the National Tourist Advertising and Information Agency on the implementation of the national advertising program;
5. Discusses and proposes to the Minister of Economy concepts and programs for tourism development in the country;
6. Provides statements on draft legislation and suggests amendments, additions or repeals;
7. Discusses issues, related to the construction and maintenance of the tourist infrastructure and attraction of foreign investments in tourism;
8. Discusses the ability of the Bulgarian air carriers to execute their charter programs;
9. Discusses the preparation for tourist seasons and the results thereof;
10. Discusses the results from the activities of the controlling bodies in tourism and the activities related thereto, and gives recommendations for improvement of their work;
11. Discusses the questions and recommends improvements to the protection of tourist services and consumers.

Ministry of Agriculture and Forests

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests consists of 16 Chief Directorates and 14 National Services, including the National Forestry Directorate. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests has the following responsibilities related to eco-tourism development:

- Implementing the national policy for developing plant cultivation and stock-breeding and for fisheries and aquaculture
- Managing the development, maintenance, storage, and use of cadastre information on agricultural and forest territories
- Developing and implementing an investment policy for agriculture and forestry, using special funds, state budget monies, and project financing through EU preaccession funds
- Implementing nature park management plans, through the National Forestry Directorate, including all activities associated with tourism development and the provision of service to visitors

Ministry of Culture

The Ministry of Culture performs several specific functions related to the development of cultural tourism and eco-tourism:

- Coordinating the efforts of various organizations in investigating and developing methodologies for the protection, operation and integration of cultural heritage in tourist development. They are also responsible for avoiding exploitation of cultural phenomena that might lead to the loss of value of these attractions
- Encouraging communication and coordination on cultural tourism issues among various institutions at the central, regional and local level
- Providing information and training to help protect Bulgaria's cultural heritage, working to combine tourism and cultural heritage, and providing local opportunities to manage and protect these resources
- Promoting the arts and forums, and linking them to appropriate tourist activities

- Helping to strengthen or establish connections with businesses, authorities and organizations in the tourist industry, and relevant scientific institutes and creative organizations
- Supervising elements of protected areas that fall under provisions of the Cultural Monuments and Museums Act.

The National Institute for Cultural Monuments (NICM) is the key Ministry section dealing with the conservation of cultural and historic heritage. The NICM investigates, researches and registers sites of cultural and historic heritage, maintains the National CM Archive Fund, and carries out the registration, permitting and controlling functions for Cultural Monuments. It also coordinates all interventions at cultural sites and in protected areas with cultural heritage and works on urban plans and specific projects concerning cultural monuments.

Bulgaria has gained considerable professional, legislative and managerial experience in the area of conservation of cultural and historical heritage. The Bulgarian conservation and restoration school was directly influenced by the European model. Bulgaria has ratified all international documents in the area of conservation of cultural heritage.

Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works

The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) implements the government's policy on regional development and territorial planning. The Ministry consists of 10 directorates, including the Chief Regional Policy Directorate. It is responsible for establishing the guidelines for and overseeing the implementation of the National Regional Development Plan (NRDP), coordinating the updating of regional and district development plans, and providing methodological instructions to municipalities on municipal strategies. The Chief Directorate has regional offices in the centers of six planning regions. They develop strategies for regional economic and social development and develop annual operational programs that incorporate National Economic Development Plan (NEDP) priorities. The regional offices support interregional and transborder cooperative efforts and efforts on rural area development.

The Ministry oversees territorial planning and the implementation of energy efficiency and environmental protection in territorial and urban planning, and construction. The MRDPW formally participates in the review process for designating national and nature parks, reserves and maintained reserves management plans, natural landmarks and protected localities. The MRDPW is responsible for financial management and accounting of projects funded by the EU PHARE Program: PHARE - Transborder Cooperation, PHARE – Economic and Social Approximation, which includes the “Roads for Access to Tourist Places” Program, ISPA and other international investment programs. The MRDPW's Road Executive Agency manages public procurement procedures for the construction, reconstruction and maintenance of national roads. They have management responsibility for the construction of local roads and urban plans and they coordinate projects and issues permits for special use of national roads.

2.3.1.2 Regional Governors

Regional governors are civil servants appointed by the Council of Ministers. They have administrative staff but do not have other subordinating structures. Regional governors are responsible for implementing regional policy and local public management, as well as for coordination between the national and local interests. They are empowered to maintain public

order and to carry out administrative control. Regional governors implement national tourism policy in the region, under Tourism Act. With the assistance of tourist associations they develop strategies and programs for the tourism development and coordinate their implementation. These strategies and programs are meant to be part of the regional development plan, developed consistent with the national priorities for tourism development, and in accordance with local and regional tourist resources and needs. Regional governors are also responsible for coordinating the efforts of their region's mayors with other regional governors on regional implementation of the National Tourism Development Program

2.3.1.3 Municipal Administrations

Municipalities are the country's territorial, administrative and planning units. They are key to creating the condition for and fostering a positive environment for eco-tourism development. The specific roles of municipal administrations in the development of tourism in general, and eco-tourism in particular, are to:

- Improve existing technical and social infrastructure
- Develop and adopt local regulations governing economic development conducted in the territory of the municipality
- Attract investors and partners from the private sector and NGOs
- Provide support to the advertising activities
- Identify eco-tourism as a priority in municipal tourist development strategies
- Conserve valuable cultural and historical resources in their territory by organizing the local management and supervision of cultural monuments and protected areas with cultural heritage.

Pursuant to the Tourism Act “the Municipal Council adopts a tourism development program for the territory of the respective municipality in compliance with the priorities of the national strategy, taking into account the local tourist resources and local needs” (Article 10, paragraph 1). The Tourism Act also specifies that the mayor of a municipality shall:

1. Draft a program for the development of tourism in the municipality together with the tourist associations and other non-profit legal entities dealing with tourism development
2. Organize an Advisory Tourist Board with representatives of the local administration, tourist associations, and other non-for-profit legal entities dealing with tourism development, local business associations, and consumers
3. Establish an expert municipal commission to categorize tourist premises, in which half the members are representatives of tourist associations operating on the territory of the municipality
4. Categorize tourist sites based on recommendations from the municipal categorization commission (pursuant to Article. 52, paragraph 1)
5. Establish and maintain a register of categorized sites within the municipal territory
6. Verify and certify the registration of tourists kept by individual hotel operators within the municipal territory
7. Assist in advertising the municipal tourist product
8. Organize information services to tourists, including tourist information centers or offices
9. Contribute to the maintenance and conservation of natural, cultural and historical sites within the municipal territory
10. Oversee law enforcement and the enforcement of secondary legislation
11. Assist state authorities in implementing tourism policy and managing the quality of the tourist product within the municipal territory

The Act grants considerable rights to municipalities for tourism development, including the right to license providers of specific services. Many municipal development strategies define tourism as a priority for their economy. Municipal efforts to create favorable conditions for tourism development are seriously impeded by a lack financial resources.

2.3.2 *Non-governmental Organizations*

National tourism non-governmental organizations are stakeholders in the eco-tourism development process, and can be classified into the following groups:

- Branch tourist associations

The Bulgarian Association of Travel Agents (BATA) is a non-profit organization of tour operators and tour agents established in 1992 to protect, combine and control the Bulgarian tourist product, and to act as a corrective to government policy on tour operators' and travel agents' activities. BATA works towards positive cooperative relationships between its member companies and the government to achieve sustainable development of the Bulgarian tourist industry. BATA has 154 members with 120 regular voting members and 34 associate members, including tour operators, travel agents, and regional tourist organizations. It is funded by membership contribution, and membership in BATA is voluntary and managed by a General Assembly with a seven-member Executive Council, headed by a President and Supervisory Council (a chairperson and 2 members). The operational work is carried out by a Secretariat.

The Bulgarian Chamber of Tourism (BCT) is a non profit organization established in 1991 to consolidate the national, regional and local branches of organizations and councils, individuals and other staff, active in the area of tourism and the hotel and restaurant industry, and includes tour operators and tour agents. BCT acts as a union, uniting Bulgarian and foreign organizations with the objective of coordinating the organization and management of commercial tourist activities. The main objective of the BCT is to summarize and raise tourism related issues before state authorities, and to protect the interests of employers and proprietors of tourist and commercial sites. BCT has 800 members, including Bulgarian and foreign enterprises, individuals, tourist companies, banks, and insurance companies. The BCT management structure consists of a General Assembly, Board of Directors, chairperson and control commission.

The Bulgarian Hotel and Restaurant Keepers Association (BHRKA) was established in 1993 as a nonprofit association. BHRKA includes hundreds of hotels and some of the biggest privatized tourist complexes, such as the Riviera Holiday Village, Albena Resort, and Russalka Holiday Village. The BHRKA has established regional groups, with the largest located along the Black Sea Coast in Sunny Beach and in Varna, in Bansko, Zlatograd, Smolyan, Plovdiv, Chepelare, Borovets, and in Sofia. One of the BHRKA's basic tasks is to unite tourism professionals and support their qualification and training, and guaranteeing protection of their rights and interests. The BHRKA participates in all debates and working groups on legislative initiatives on tourist business, and it is a member of many leading bodies and commissions working to improve conditions for tourism development. Since 1996 BHRKA has been the first professional organization in Bulgaria to hold an annual awards ceremony, giving awards for the best achievements in hotel keeping, management, catering, and investments.

All three Associations are represented on the National Tourism Council.

- Product Tourist Associations

There are four associations of providers of specialized tourism products in Bulgaria. Two are closely involved in eco-tourism.

The *Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism* was established in 1998 and presently consists of 65 member organizations including companies, protected areas directorates, regional tourist associations, and individual businesses. The Association is managed by a Board of Directors (10 members, headed by a Chairperson) and a Control Council (3 members).

The *Bulgarian Association for Rural and Ecological Tourism* was founded in 1995. It consists of 25 organizations and 83 individual tourist business owners.

The other two associations are the *Bulgarian Balneology Association*, a potentially important partner in eco-tourism development, and the *Association of IATA Agencies* in Bulgaria.

- Regional Tourist Associations

These are networks of tourist service providers in particular regions. Currently there are several organizations operating in the country that are gradually specializing in ecological tourism:

Pirin Tourist Forum was established in 1997 as an association between 11 municipalities and Pirin National Park. The Forum is managed by a Board of Directors and a Managing Council. Its mission is to support the development sustainable tourism in the Pirin region.

Stara Planina Tourist Association was established in 1996 and currently has more than 200 members, including hotel owners, family hotels, houses, dining and entertainment facilities. A Managing Board that consists of 6 members manages the Association.

Burgas Association for Ecological and Rural Tourism was established in 1995. It has 36 individual members and 19 corporate members (4 state institutions, 6 companies and 9 civic associations). The Association cooperates with many municipalities and with the mayor's office.

Varna Tourist Chamber was established in 1991 and has 139 members and is managed by a Chairperson and a ten-member Managing Board.

Eco-tourism Association Central Balkan– Kalofer was established in 2002. It has 34 members, including local eco-tourism businesses, local authorities, and Central Balkan National Park representatives. A Managing Council of 9 members manages the Association.

Rila Eco-tourism Association- Samokov was established in 2002 and has 40 members. A Managing Board of 7 members, chaired by an Executive Director, manages the Association.

Rhodopes Regional Tourist Association was established in 2003. It has 65 members, and it is managed by a 13-member Managing Council and a seven-member Control Council.

There are some other regionally based associations that focus on mass tourism, not eco-tourism.

- Local Tourism Associations

A specific nature attraction, historical heritage or cultural monument in places such as Mogilitsa, Trigrad, and Bolyarovo promoted the formation of local tourism associations by local entrepreneurs. In most cases, local associations include representatives of local authorities, museums, schools, and NGOs. They work to attract funding for local infrastructure problems or for developing ideas and projects on local tourism development. There are 51 regional and local Tourism Councils. Some are active, while others exist solely on paper.

The Tourism Act of 1998 provided for the establishment of regional and local tourist councils (NGOs) in Bulgaria. Their functions include inventorying tourist resources and maintaining a tourist database; providing tourist information, developing tourist information centers; advertising their respective regions in Bulgaria and abroad; organizing specialized trainings and investigations of the demand and supply in the territory; and providing expert assistance on local/regional development strategic planning. These are voluntary local initiatives of the state government at local level and with the local entrepreneurs.

Bulgarian Tourism Union

The Bulgarian Tourist Union (BTU) is one of the biggest national, non-governmental organizations addressing domestic tourism. It has more than 6000 individual members and 162 member associations around the country. The BTU and its local offices manage a large percentage of the formerly state-managed hiking and mountain tourism system, and are responsible for operating and maintaining most of the mountains chalets, hiking routes, and international trail system that cross the country. They also operate a diverse system of accommodations and services outside of the mountains and protected areas system. Many of their holdings are old and in poor condition, and the BTU needs funds to make needed improvements.

- Nature Conservation NGOs

There are many nature conservation non-governmental organizations that have arisen over the last 5 to 12 years. These nature conservation civil society groups are engaged major elements of the National Strategy for Biological Diversity Conservation, and provide both an advocacy and watch-dog role in biodiversity conservation policy and programs at national and local levels. Some of these groups are increasingly engaged in biodiversity conservation and protected area project design and implementation. Some of these NGOs are actively engaged in small protected area management, and as a consequence, are turning to tourism development and eco-tourism as tools for realizing conservation goals inside and outside of protected areas. The most significant of these national organizations are supported by regional affiliates, and include: Bulgarian Society for Bird Protection, the Wilderness Fund, Green Balkans, Balkani. Smaller organizations, with largely local/regional focus include: Le Balkan, Rhodopes, Friends of the Sea Club in Varna, Sustainable Development Initiative Group in Silistra, Friends of Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park, Rhodope Youth Organization and others.

The main eco-tourism related activities of these organizations are:

- campaigns for training of local entrepreneurs and tourism service providers;
- inventory of tourism resources and services;
- publication of educational and/or advertising materials;
- operations and maintenance of visitor information centers.

Some of these conservation NGOs have developed to the point where private sector ecotourism enterprise has split from the role and functions of the organization. As a consequence there are a number of small, private enterprises offering ecotourism programs, services, and itineraries for visitors. Most of their clientele are foreign. Neophron and Explorer 2000 are good examples.

For many of these conservation NGOs, enterprise development and business planning are not part of their experience or their mandate. Subsequently, they are forced to turn to the private sector for guidance in the development of viable tourism enterprises in sustainable development activities, including ecotourism.

A review of the geographical distribution of activities conducted by these conservation NGOs indicates that a lot of ecotourism initiatives exist within the country. The greatest number of these efforts focuses on information and visitor centres that address nature conservation and visitor information services. Many of these centers were originally set up with foreign assistance project funding, and none of them yet operates on a viable business basis (*Appendix No 2*).

Most of the nature conservation organizations active in the area of eco-tourism have established an office and have acquired equipment, but few of them have sufficient staff, and very few are capable of paying salaries. Subsequently, these organizations depend on an active network of volunteers often organized for campaign efforts. Most of these are college and high school students.

Communication between NGOs that are active in the area of eco-tourism is still young and poorly developed. National networks of visitor information centers are absent, and there is no practice of sharing resources and experience. There are however, increasing attempts by protected area manager and conservation NGOs to forge partnerships for the implementation of protected area management plans. The network of three national parks and 11 nature parks are increasingly beginning to development joint programs for tourism inside the park with community tourism efforts in and around these same protected areas.

Local and Regional Associations

Organizations such as the National Association of Municipalities, the Foundation for Local Government Reform, and other regional associations and public organizations have not yet played a role in the development of eco-tourism (*Appendix No5*). Most of these organizations are active in local governance and decentralization. In many cases they receive funding from international donor programs to support their work on democratization and decentralization of governance. Eco-tourism is not a priority objective in their work yet. However they can play an important role in the future, since they support the efforts of local authorities for social and economic development at local and regional level. Municipal administrations are beginning to realize and master the leading role they can play in the development of eco-tourism.

2.3.3 Private Business Profile

There is no overall analysis of private businesses specializing in eco-tourism in Bulgaria. This sector of the economy has never been consolidated in a way that allows for the collection and analysis of information on eco-tourism, and none of the product organizations has attempted to collect these data.

2.3.3.1 Bulgarian Tour Operators and Eco-tourism

There are more than 1000 tour operators and more than 500 tour agents in Bulgaria. The typical local tourist agency is small with 1 or 2, and up to 15 employees. There are less than ten large companies, including Balkantourist and Albena Plc. There are an insignificant number of tour operators that work with the Bulgarian tourist in Bulgaria. Most rely on foreign tourists, sending Bulgarian tourists abroad, or a combination of both.¹

The decision of a tourism agency to market a tourism destination is based on whether the destination meets the following criteria:

- Profitability
- Natural landmarks and sights
- Accommodation with all the conveniences, recreational facilities and attractions
- Diversity of good dining places and cultural sites
- Professional service
- Good road conditions

Bulgarian tourist companies offer packages to well-known and established resorts. There is little diversity or deviation from these conventional packages. The products are usually the traditional ones of sunbathing, swimming in the sea, visits to churches, monasteries and famous cultural monuments, delicious food and culinary experiences and skiing. It is very difficult to convince foreign agents to offer their clients something new. Employees of tour agents do not have training in specialized tourist products. Under the best scenario, tourist companies show interest in passively marketing eco-tourism products, since active market development requires a considerable amount of money.

There are no official statistics on the number or types of companies that specialize in eco-tourist packages. However, as the specialized tourist market consolidates, information from travel agents and information from national, regional tourist exhibitions and exchanges will be useful. Bulgarian tour operators who represent the market segment of eco-tourism can be divided into three groups:

- The largest group is comprised of companies selling just accommodation (overnights or overnight and breakfast). Their clients may be eco-tourists, but often it is solely the region or the accommodation that is advertised, not a tourist package or an eco-tourism product.
- The second group is comprised of tourism agencies selling mountain products such as green schools or summer mountain trips. Among them are Pirintourist 2000, Radetski Tourist Bureau, and Orbita. These trips are in the natural environment and include an interpretative component. Their clients are schoolchildren, university students, and people of middle and low incomes seeking organized trips.
- The third group is comprised of tourism companies offering an integral product of eco-tourism. Examples of these are Pandion, Neophron, Zig-zag Holidays, Lyub-travel, Odysseya-IN, Lucky Tours, and Vegena. They offer either highly specialized products such as bird observation, botanic tours, and a cultural program or programs of a mixed type including eco-tourism components. Their clients are mainly international tourists from EU countries, the USA, Israel, Japan and the Scandinavian countries.

¹The Bulgarian Eco-tourism Development Outlook: Survey of the Domestic Market, 2002. The BCEG Project funded this project, which outlined the existing status tour operators' and tour agents' businesses. The report describes the profile of the typical tourism company, its business motivation, and attitudes towards the eco-tourism product. The research was conducted using semi-standardized interviews with 21 companies, and it is not representative of the whole group of tourist companies.

This last group of Bulgarian eco-tourism operators attempts to capitalize on two international marketable advantages for Bulgaria – low in-country costs, and diverse natural and cultural offerings. Yet this business is marginal. More specifically, these companies suffer from non-existent or small advertising budgets, and find no government assistance for promotion, and/or exhibitions. There is no practice that nurtures the development of private ecotourism business on the national or domestic markets. Subsequently, turnover is small and returns minimal.

In addition, services and infrastructure in rural areas are often inadequate, poorly maintained, or both. Community eco-tourism service providers are inexperienced, and have little appreciation for the timeliness of services in a visitor itinerary. Eco-tourism businesses are therefore forced to invest in facilities and services/training if they are to develop and expand their niche market. After these investments, there is little profit margin.

2.3.3.2 International Tour Operators and Eco-tourism in Bulgaria

International tour operators work mostly with local partners in Bulgaria. There are only a few companies that independently develop tourism or eco-tourism packages. Foreign tour operators can be divided into two groups: companies dealing mainly in mass tourism that include elements of eco-tourism in their packages or offer it as an option, and companies that sell mainly specialty packages, including eco-tourism packages. Among the former is TUI and Neckermann, providing most of the contracts for the resort complexes at the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The list of the latter is much longer and includes Trekking y Aventura (Spain), UCPA, Terres d’Aventure, and Allibert, La Ballaguere (France), Walking Softly Adventures, Ramblers holidays, Exodus, Explore (UK and USA), Studiosus reisen, Wikinger (Germany), and SNP (Netherlands). Israeli companies have been strong in Bulgaria since 2002. They work independently and with the support of Bulgarian partners.

2.3.3.3 Local Providers

Private initiatives in tourism and eco-tourism are among the fastest developing sector Bulgaria over the last ten years. One can find services and houses suited for tourists in the most isolated villages outside the main tourist areas. These are usually owned by local people who have previously worked in tourism or people from bigger towns who have bought or constructed their own cottages in these villages. Most of these houses are constructed with personal funds and are used for personal needs. Two or three of the rooms in these houses are refurbished and are used for accommodating tourists. The income is invested for further construction, renovation or refurbishing. The situation with catering facilities is similar.

Local eco-tourism providers are most often small entrepreneurs with minimum equity and resources. They usually have a family business where members of the family are the main employees. Most often, one member of the family has the leading role since he or she has more time (in the cases with hotels and small restaurants) and special skills,(in the cases with crafts, tour guides and other services). Increasingly, many of these small, rural tourist accommodations are diversifying their offerings and providing special programs for hiking, picnics, horseback riding, crafts, nature observations, craft production, and bicycling.

Very rarely the owners have used loans from private individuals or from banks. The prevailing opinion is that this is a more unfavorable scenario and the local entrepreneurs try to start their business with their own money and relying on their own strength.

There is no regional or national record of these establishments, and a high percentage of these are not registered. There is no national association serving their needs, and little in the way of regional or municipal support for these businesses or their development. A growing number of these facilities, however, are learning to band together in local and regional eco-tourism and tourism associations in order to benefit from collection activities such as marketing, sales, reservations, and service packages.

Marketing is largely accomplished by individual publicity efforts, and most is by word-of-mouth.

There are many local tourism data bases/inventories, which have been created through donor projects and programs in the country. These included the regional tourism services, accommodation and sites databases for Veliko Turnovo and Smolyan, compiled with German technical assistance, to the more localized and specific databases of the Pirin Tourism Forum and the National Parks. Smaller inventories exist in many forms, and most have been undertaken by local non-governmental organizations. The information is kept in different formats and on different platforms. Very often inventory catalogues have been published on the basis of this information. Some are disseminated at trade fairs or sold. Others are available to local municipalities for the development and promotion of local tourism.

Nature and National Park administrations are also engaged in the design and development of ecotourism services inside and outside their territories. They are increasingly developing programs that focus on four key aspects of eco-tourism development:

- (1) commercial contracts with local communities for goods and services to be provided inside the parks;
- (2) education campaigns aimed at limiting the impacts from unregulated or poorly management tourism;
- (3) dramatic improvements in park infrastructure for tourism, including picnic and camping sites, special activity areas, new trails and shelters;
- (4) identification of public-private partnerships that link community eco-tourism offerings with sites and opportunities inside the parks.

The latter includes the development of specialized trails, and itineraries to sites of special interest. In addition, park administrations are becoming more engaged in the development and training of staff as interpretation and park guides.

2.3.4 Investment Institutions

Investment in eco-tourism is still weak. There are few examples of loans for eco-tourist projects provided by commercial banks. Eco-tourism financing faces several challenges. Typically the average eco-tourism project is too small to provoke substantial interest on the part of banks. Often the revenue from such projects is volatile and seasonal, creating uncertainty about timely repayment of loans. In many cases the entrepreneurs applying for funds for eco-tourism projects lack a multi-year track record of successful business operations usually required by banks.

There are a growing number of banks with positive attitudes towards loans for eco-tourism at the village/community level. These include Hebrosbank, Bulgarian-American Credit Bank, United Bulgarian Bank, Encouragement Bank, and First Investment Bank. From the banks'

perspective eco-tourism projects are SME loans and have to meet the standard set of loan approval criteria. Thus, many of the Banks are supporting private sector investment projects for middle and upper class Bulgarians returning to family villages to set up tourism businesses.

Other investment projects include the makeover of privatized hotels and state buildings that include both improvements and investments in environmental management practices and technologies. Many Banks have advised that most rural, community-based and local eco-tourism projects may try private equity first and in a couple of years take their hopefully successful operating history to the banks along with their loan application. With the growth in the field of eco-tourism in Bulgaria, with increasing stability in the banking sector, and with a greater number of regional and local banking offices, the efforts to create an enabling environment for eco-tourism are making commercial loans increasingly accessible.

Legislative Impediments to rural, community-based Eco-tourism

The existing legislation does not allow local associations or small local companies to offer eco-tourism “packages. On the contrary”, local eco-tourism associations and small local companies are forced to use the marketing and sales services of the tour companies from the major cities. In addition, the new Tourism Act (October 2002) requires strict categorization of houses, family hotels or any other type of accommodation, and requires on their registration. In the absence of registration, the fines that can be levied affect not only the owner of the accommodation but also the tour operator who uses it.

2.3.5 Donor Programs

Project for Ecological and Sustainable Tourism in Pirin and Rila (PREST)

PREST was initiated by the Ministry of Environment and Water and funded by the British Know How Fund from 1994-1997, at a level of GBP 500,000. PREST aimed at establishing a broad partnership network at the regional level for developing sustainable tourism in the Pirin region. PREST included training stakeholders in the region. Among its greatest achievements are a detailed inventory of tourist resources, the first regional tourist database and collection of records, the start of the Made in Pirin initiative, marketing local souvenir craftsmen’s products, and establishing a foundation for a regional association for environmental education. When PREST was completed in 1997 the Pirin Tourist Forum (PTF) was established, an association of municipalities in the region and Pirin National Park. The British Know How Fund supported the PTF until March 2001. In 1998 the PTF was officially acknowledged by the Ministry of Economy as a regional tourist organization of Southwest Bulgaria, and in 1999 was recognized by the Minister of Economy as an “Organization contributing to the preservation and promotion of Bulgarian cultural and historic heritage”.

Project for Tourism Development in Stara Planina: Tryavna, Gabrovo, Apriltsi, Troyan and Teteven

The Project’s objective was to combine and coordinate efforts at the local and regional levels to promote and increase tourism in the region by offering common tourist products. The Swiss government supported the project from 1994-2000, at a level of 1.5 million Swiss Francs. The Project results have been institutionalized in the form of the Stara Planina Tourist Association, based in the town of Gabrovo. In 2003 the Association signed a three-year contract with the Swiss Government for BGN 145,000.

PHARE Project BG0202.02 “Bulgarian Eco-tourism Development”

The Ministry of Economy will implement the “Bulgarian Eco-tourism Development” project, approved for funding within the EU PHARE 2002 Program. The Project comes under the priorities PHARE Program “Economic and Social Approximation”. The objectives are to:

- Improve the quality of tourist product, particularly in eco-tourism, and increase the contribution of eco-tourism to Bulgaria’s gross domestic product (GDP)
- Expand the geographical scope of the tourist sector
- Prolong the tourist season

The Project will provide grants to rehabilitate and modernize infrastructure related to eco-tourism, and to introduce new tourist products. Expected results include:

- Adaptation of natural sites as eco-tourism attractions by creating conditions that preserve and sustains their essence.
- Development of specialized infrastructure that makes these sites available to the public
- Improvement in the quality of eco-tourism services
- Increase in employment in underdeveloped regions
- Improvement and coordination of eco-tourism marketing
- Development and distribution of printed and multimedia marketing materials

Project beneficiaries are regional and municipal institutions and NGOs. The total is 5.3 million Euro, and the PHARE Program provided 4.0 million Euro and the Bulgarian government.

PHARE Project BG 0102.03 “Development of Bulgaria’s Cultural Tourism”

The Ministry of Economy is implementing the “Development of Bulgaria’s Cultural Tourism” project, approved for funding within the framework of the EU PHARE Program 2001. The project comes under the priorities of the PHARE Program “Economic and Social Approximation”. The main goal of this project is to improve the quality of the tourist product, particularly in the area of cultural tourism, to increase the sector’s contribution to Bulgaria’s GDP, and to generate incomes in regions of concern. The project aims to improve the quality and market value of Bulgarian cultural and tourist products. Its strategic objectives are targeted at a more complete use of Bulgaria’s cultural and historic heritage and develop cultural and rural tourism in new regions.

The results are expected to be:

- Restoration of cultural monuments of tourist significance
- Improvements to adjoining infrastructure
- Creation of competitive tourist products
- Successful marketing of tourist products in the domestic and international market
- Distribution of tourist information on the regions and areas of cultural significance
- Increase in tourism revenues through greater numbers of tourists and an increase in their daily expenditures
- Job creation and training of staff employed in the tourist sector

The total project budget is 7.0 million Euro, with the PHARE Program providing 5.4 million Euro and the Bulgarian government 1.6 million Euro.

Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Official Assistance for Development (OAD)

Since 2003, the JICA has included Bulgaria in its training program for eco-tourism. Under its OAD programs, JICA offers training, expert assistance, equipment, and technical assistance on projects. It also provides research and volunteer services, and administers capital loans and assistance programs. JICA assigned its Kushiro International Wetlands Center to organize a training course on eco-tourism and the conservation of the environment and its resources for the period 2002-2006. The course is conducted once per year and lasts between 6 and 9 weeks. Training is given to governmental officials responsible for the conservation of wetlands, wildlife and migratory birds, as well as park managers from various countries. Beginning in 2003, each year, one Bulgarian wetland manager will be trained in eco-tourism.

Bulgarian-German Cooperation

The Technical Cooperation Office (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit or GTZ) of the German Federal Ministry for Technical Cooperation and Assistance implements the Economy and Employment Promotion Program through its office in Sofia. The “Tourism Promotion in the Regions of Koprivshitsa, Kazanlak, Smolyan, Veliko Tarnovo” project is one of 15 program components. The total annual funding for all 15 components amounts to BGN 4.5 million. The first phase of the program was implemented during the period 2000 – 2002 and included consulting services at the national level on an analysis of travel in Bulgaria, development and implementation of national and regional tourism strategies, and analysis of potential marketing. Consulting services are also offered to academics and local unions and associations on how to expand their services; on product formation, for example, itineraries for monasteries, itineraries for wineries, open-air museums, balneology, and festivals; organizational strengthening, and lobbying. Consulting assistance is provided to individual entrepreneurs as well. The second phase of the program is envisaged to continue until 2005.

Firm Level Assistance Group (FLAG)

FLAG is a consortium of non-profit organizations providing business development assistance to firms with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The main goal of FLAG is to accelerate the development and growth of private Bulgarian enterprises in a competitive environment. FLAG provides the following services:

- Technical assistance by American volunteer executives and local consultants
- Market and technology information services
- Seminars and workshops
- Trade show participation
- Financial resources/business plan development

FLAG works in the priority sectors of agribusiness, light manufacturing, apparel and textile, information technology and software development, communications, and tourism. In January 2002 FLAG delivered business-planning training to the two eco-tourism initiative groups from the BCEG Project. With this training and some additional assistance, a small business in Samokov was given a loan by the United Bulgarian Bank. A FLAG tourism expert consulted with the Association of Private Hotel and Restaurant Owners to define the concept, establish criteria, and nationally promote the Green Hotel Initiative Award. In November 2002 FLAG conducted an assessment of Bulgarian bed and breakfasts and presented an action plan, aimed at achieving an increased competitiveness for the Bulgarian alternative tourism industry, export facilitation, and increased access to financing and job generation.

FLAG provided consultations to a considerable numbers of bed & breakfast (B&Bs) and family hotels (Bulgarski Dom) in the Balkan and Rhodope mountain regions. Consultations were done in 20 communities: Belogradchick, Chiprovtsi, Zgorigrad/Pavolche, Roman, Etropole, Tetevenska, Ribaritsa, Chiflik, Beli Osam, Cherni Osam, Apriltsi, Tryavna, Elena, Vishovgrad, Vezenkovo, Zlatograd, Bukata, Manastir, Orehovo, and Shiroka Luka. The major objective was to examine the current level of occupancy, occupancy pattern, price ranges and sales, and marketing channels used by B&Bs and family hotels to sell accommodations. Entrepreneurs, or suppliers, of accommodation services were introduced to practical ways and techniques of using various distribution channels to promote and sell accommodations to domestic and foreign tourists.

2.3.6 Projects and Programs in Biodiversity Conservation

Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth Project (BCEG), funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID)

The current Project is a 3-year program (2000 - 2003) at a funding level of 2.4 Million USD. The main Project areas are:

- Finalizing management plans for Rila and Central Balkan National Parks and implementing priority projects, such as visitors' infrastructure, interpretation programs, biological and tourism monitoring projects
- Developing a management plan for Rila Monastery Nature Park
- Establishing financial mechanisms for protected areas management
- Eco-enterprise activities in the field of natural resources management and eco-tourism associated with the national parks
- Public awareness and public education and communication programs to generate support for biodiversity conservation in the national parks

The BCEG Project provides consulting assistance, training, and capital investments to create conditions for eco-tourism development in the national parks and the areas around them. The Project supports the National Park Directorates in their work with local authorities and entrepreneurs on developing eco-tourist partnerships. The eco-tourism development model around the two national parks was the basis for establishing the National Eco-tourism Working Group and developing the National Eco-tourism Strategy. The Project has also been successful in helping to establish the Protected Areas Endowment Fund. This Fund is administered under the National Trust EcoFund. The Fund's first, five-year strategy is being developed. The Bulgarian government has committed 12,5 million leva to the Fund for the next five years, and the first international donation by Global Environment Facility (GEF) is expected in 2004.

The Global Environment Facility Project "Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity in the Landscape of Bulgaria's Rhodopes Mountain"

This five-year project is anticipated to start in September 2003. The total funding requested is USD 3.5 million. The Project's general objective is the long-term conservation of the globally significant biodiversity in the Rhodopes Mountains, in the south and southeast Bulgaria. Four main results are expected:

- Stakeholders conserve biodiversity in the two regions of the Rhodopes, by integrating the policies and practices of biodiversity conservation in industrial activities

- Stakeholders strengthen and revive biodiversity conservation in the priority protected areas, by linking them to the surrounding landscape
- Information is exchanged and public awareness is increased to create fellowships for biodiversity conservation in a broader range in the Rhodopes;
- Stakeholders successfully implement and demonstrate alternative forms of livelihood in the east and west regions of the Rhodopes.

This Project is expected to develop pilot projects for promoting the sustainable use of nature resources and alternative incomes for local communities. Eco-tourism is the most promising option.

The Bulgarian Swiss Bio-diversity Conservation Program (BSBCP)

BSBCP was initiated as a partnership program and later transformed into a Bulgarian non-governmental organization, funded by the Swiss Government and entrusted to the Swiss Pro Natura NGO in cooperation with the SVS (Schweizer Vogleschutz, Birdlife Switzerland). BSBCP helps implement the National Biodiversity Strategy. It also assists the Bulgarian Government in meeting its obligations under the RAMSAR Biodiversity Convention and other international agreements. Program implementation is divided into three phases:

Phase 1 – 1994-1997, with a total funding of CHF 1.8 million;

Phase 2 – 1998-2001, with a total funding of CHF 2.0 million;

Phase 3 – 2001-2004, with a total funding of CHF 2.485 million.

The Program's priority geographical regions include the Eastern Rhodopes, Strandja, South Black Sea wetlands, Black Sea Dobrudja, and the Central Balkans. Recently the BSBCP has been working in the Pirin region, assisting with development of the Pirin National Park Management Plan. The main objective of the BSBCP is biodiversity conservation and reinforcement of protected areas in its priority regions. Main activities include: implementation of management plans, wider public participation in the conservation of nature and wildlife, and a search for mechanisms to achieve sustainability.

Bulgaria wetlands Restoration and Pollution Reduction Project, funded by the World Bank

This five-year Project (2002 – 2007) is a part of the Danube River/Black Sea basins strategic partnership for nutrient reduction (phase ?). It will help the Bulgarian government meet its national and international obligations to reduce trans-boundary nutrient loads. The Project aims to conserve biodiversity in the Danube River and the Black Sea basin through improved management and sustainable use of natural resources and restoration of wetlands. The total requested Project funding amounts to USD 13,280,000. The following funds have been secured: USD 7.5 million provided by the GEF, USD 2.9 million provided by the Government of Bulgaria, and USD 1.8 million, provided by PHARE. The Project components are:

?. Wetlands restoration

B. Integrated protected area management

C. Project coordination, management and monitoring

Component B provides for establishing a Center for the development of sustainable business activities that will support local community efforts to draw up marketable, environmentally friendly business proposals to SAPARD or other similar funding. The Project will support the implementation of a number of pilot projects, including eco-tourism.

Birdlife International's "Important Bird Areas in Bulgaria Program" (IBA)

The Program has been in operation since 1989 and is implemented by the Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds. The Program objectives are to identify bird protection areas in Bulgaria, i.e. important bird areas, and guarantee their long-term protection and sustainable management. Fifty important bird areas have been identified in Bulgaria and are the subject of monitoring and preservation actions. The list will be updated to include areas of importance to the EU, the so-called Special Protection Areas. Eco-tourism and bird watching have been promoted as tools for nature conservation.

2.3.7. *Projects and Programs to Develop a Cultural Itineraries Network and Integrate Eco-tourism and Cultural Tourism*

"The European Heritage Network" Project

This Project is included in the EU's Fifth Framework Program IST-01.6.1?, and is funded by the European Commission, coordinated by the Council of Europe. The Project objective is to develop a permanent and regularly updated information system that provides information to central and the local authorities, experts and scientists about the development, protection and management of the cultural heritage of European countries. Bulgaria was included in the Project for 2002 and 2003. The Ministry of Culture is the coordinator for Bulgaria and the main contractors are the National Cultural Monuments Institute and the Bulgarian National ICOMOS Committee. The Project received funding in the amount of 38,000 Euro provided by the EC, and 8,000 levs provided by the Ministry of Culture.

National Scheme for Cultural Itineraries Project, implemented within the framework of the PHARE Program BG9606 for support of Bulgarian culture

This Project, implemented by the Bulgarian National ICOMOS Committee in 1999, developed the first national map of cultural itineraries as a basis for joint action for eco-tourism and cultural tourism. The map was developed integrating the most valuable natural environments with the most significant sites of immobile cultural and historical heritage. The main Project components were:

- Selection of the most valuable sites of natural and cultural heritage and setting up a GIS database
- Drawing up a series of maps with thematic cultural itineraries
- Developing a pilot project of networks of cultural and eco-tourism itineraries in the territories of the municipalities of Gotse Delchev, Garmen and Hadjidimovo.

The Project results have been tested in the pilot municipalities in accordance with the priority tourist itineraries. The total funding amounted to USD 5000.

Cultural Itineraries of the Southeast Europe Project, implemented within the framework of the CE campaign "Europe, Common Heritage" and the European Heritage Days

This Project, implemented by the Bulgarian National ICOMOS Committee with the support of the King Boduen Foundation (Belgium), is a continuation of the National Network of Cultural Itineraries Project. It encompasses a wider regional context and includes a pilot project of the ICOMOS International Charter on Cultural Tourism. It demonstrates the

potential of Southeast Europe as a regional eco-tourism and cultural tourism destination, and can serve as a basis for coordinated regional policy for conservation and use of the unique natural and cultural heritage. From 1999-2002 the project received funding in the amount of 45,600 BGL. The basic project components are:

- Establishing an expert network in all countries in the region and organizing an international workshop
- Selecting and compiling a GIS database of the most valuable sites of natural and cultural heritage in the region, with a special emphasis on the system of sites of world cultural and natural heritage
- Developing maps of cultural itineraries of Southeast Europe that cover the territorial and thematic itineraries and demonstrate regional identity
- Involving the Project in a system of specific projects for local and transborder cultural itineraries, with the participation of the tourist sector
- Developing an Internet-network for virtual European cultural itineraries, in partnership with the European Institute for Cultural Itineraries.

In 2002, the Project was recognized with the Premium Award of the EU Delegation in Bulgaria and was highly appreciated by the Council of Europe and ICOMOS. A new grant application has been submitted for 2003.

2.3.8 Projects and Programs to Develop Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs Implementing Policy Change, USAID

The overall goal of this project is to introduce a sustainable process by which the private sector becomes more actively engaged in developing and advocating its policy agenda to the government and other public institutions. The project covers the period 2001-2005 and provides consulting assistance on legislative drafting, and development of policies and regulations to foster a competitive market economy with special emphasis on the development of small and medium enterprises.

Program components include:

1. Vidin Business Incubator- this project will contribute to the sustainable expansion of the SMEs sector in Bulgaria in short- and medium-term.
2. Competitive Sectors Loan Guarantee: In September 2001, the Bulgarian First Investment Bank and USAID issued loan guarantees with a value of 20 million USD. The loan agreement enables Bulgaria to promote private small and medium businesses operating in the area of tourism, information technologies, and transport and light industry sectors. USAID guarantees will cover up to 50% of each loan, not exceed a total of 10 million USD, with the First Investment Bank securing the remaining part of the guarantee. Loans may be available in Bulgarian levs, Euro or USD for a period from one to seven years.

Job Opportunities through Business Support (JOBS), UN Development Program (UNDP)

The project covers the period 2000-2005, and it works with 43 municipalities from all over the country. The total project funding amounts to 16 million dollars, of which the Bulgarian Government provided 96%. UNDP and the Governments of three kingdoms – Norway, Belgium, and Spain, secured the remainder. This project promotes economic development in rural areas by working to foster an environment where job creation is promoted through

support to micro- and small enterprises in selected economically depressed regions of Bulgaria. The project is a model for promoting and establishing micro and small enterprises and is being implemented in 23 sites. The project has four components:

- Establishing and providing support to 20 agribusiness centers, and providing local businesses with training, technical, managerial, network and logistic support, as well as financial mechanisms
- Establishing eight business incubators in agribusiness centers, providing the premises at prices below the market, and providing administrative and managerial support to micro- and small enterprises
- Setting up information technological centers in the 20 agribusiness centers
- Preparing and broadcasting forty films, 30 minutes each, showing agriculture on private farms on the National Television Channel 1

Job Creation and Promotion of Sustainable Livelihood through the Regional Initiatives Fund, UNDP

The Project was implemented in 137 municipalities from all over the country between 1998 and 2002. Its total funding amounts to 21 million dollars, provided by the Government of Bulgaria, USAID, the World Bank, municipalities, NGOs, and UNDP. This project provides opportunities for developing vital and autonomous social funding mechanisms to address community demands for priority investments in social and economic infrastructure. It consists of four components: a) micro-projects, driven by demand and providing opportunities for revenues generation; b) project management, including cost management and monitoring, evaluation and technical assistance for establishing a social fund; c) labor market analysis, including funding employment research conducted by the National Statistical Bureau, and impact assessment of the market program on the active labor market, and d) introduction of a pilot credit guarantee fund to support micro- and small enterprises.

Beautiful Bulgaria ????: Jobs for Tourism Development, UNDP

The Beautiful Bulgaria ??? Project covers the period 2000-2005, and has an approved budget of USD 31 million. 106 municipalities from all over the country are involved in the project. Its strategy is to create temporary jobs in the construction and renovation of tourist sites, landmarks, and facilities located within and around selected municipal centers, thereby creating conditions for sustainable employment in the tourist sector. The Civil Initiative component provides house owners with the opportunity to adjust their premises to accommodate tourists with 50% of the project cost financed through a project grant, 30% from a guaranteed bank loan, and 20% by the property owner.

Guaranteed Loans to SMEs through Micro-funds, George Soros

Micro-funds provide consulting assistance for the development of vital ideas for SMEs. The project also provides support to new businesses to apply for loans from the United Bulgarian Bank. Ten micro-funds have been organized as foundations in Smolyan, Kurdjali, Sliven, Burgas, Blagoevgrad, Silistra, Vratsa, Russe, Razgrad, and Sofia under the “umbrella” of Sofia Micro-fund.

2.3.9 Projects and Programs for Sustainable Agricultural Development

Swiss Program in the Region of the Central Balkan

This project has been active from 1999-2003 with total funding of CHF 1.5 million. It promotes the use of resources that can help farmers meet market demand in the best possible way. The target group consists of independent farmers from eighteen municipalities and towns in the area of the Central Balkan. The project aims to promote farming efficiency by using more information and applying sustainable bio-agriculture.

EU SAPARD Program

There are three measures planned under the SAPARD Program that directly or partially fall within the project for support to micro and small enterprises development, and include bio-diversity conservation and eco-tourism development.

One is the “*Development and diversification of economic activities, providing opportunities for multilateral activities and alternative forms of income*”, under the National Plan for developing agriculture and rural areas. Financial assistance, in the form of a subsidy, is provided for projects in the following areas: rural tourism, local crafts and agro-industry, timber processing and bio-fuels, silk-worm production, bee keeping, horse breeding, fishery and aqua plant culture, cultivating mushroom, processing essential oils, medicinal plants and mushrooms. This measure is being implemented from 2000-2006, with a total proposed funding of 61,333,000 Euro. The SAPARD contribution amounts to 23,000,000 Euro, the Bulgarian government contribution is 7,666,000 Euro, and private contributions are 30,666,000 Euro.

The second is “*Renovation and development of villages, conservation of rural heritage and cultural traditions*”. Financial assistance is provided in the following areas: construction and improvement of water supply networks, improvements to street networks; construction or improvement of sewage networks; restoration of historical buildings, including public municipal property; construction or restoration of multifunctional cultural/information centers and parks that are public municipal property; and construction and improvement of collection points for agricultural and household waste including sites for collection of animal corpses. This measure is being implemented from 2001-2006, with total funding planned at 38,000,000 Euro. The SAPARD contribution amounts to 28,500,000 Euro, and the Bulgarian government contribution is 9,500,000 Euro.

The third is “*Development and improvement of inter-settlement infrastructure*”. Financial assistance will be available for municipal projects aimed at improving existing municipal roads linking two or several settlements within the area of one municipality or two adjacent municipalities; improving roads leading to natural and historical sights, as well as to cultural monuments; improving rural roads; improving and expanding existing inter-settlement water supply infrastructure, except for projects related to the construction of artificial dams and reservoirs, and improving irrigation systems.

2.3.10 Projects and Programs for Infrastructure Improvements Affecting Eco-tourism Development

Program Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession (ISPA) European Union

ISPA provides financial support for measures in the field of environment and transport to foster compliance by candidate countries with the European legislation.. The ISPA budget covers the period 2000-2006, and is managed by the European Commission. ISPA projects in environmental management include:

- Drinking Water Supply / Sewage Waters Treatment
- Solid and Hazardous Waste Management
- Industrial pollution
- Air pollution control

ISPA projects in transportation include:

- Extending the Trans-European Transport Networks to provide for better links between the European Union and candidate countries (international transport corridors 4, 7, 8, 9, 10)
- Internal links between national networks and links between the latter and the Trans-European Transport Networks.

The Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment Network (TINA Network) will serve as a model for project identification. The total value of ISPA-funded projects in Bulgaria for the project period is expected to be 80 and 120 million Euro.

Municipal roads for access to sites of tourist interest of the EU PHARE Program BG0102.04

The main project objective is to facilitate access to sites of tourist interest through reconstruction and rehabilitation of municipal roads. The total budget for this project is 15 million Euro, with 10 provided by the PHARE Program and 5 million from the state budget. There are 2 contracts for the Northwest region of Bulgaria and 2 for the South Central region, with construction deadlines in 2005. The implementing agency for this project is the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works.

2.4 Eco-tourism Infrastructure

2.4.1 General Infrastructure

- **Road Network**

The southern Bulgarian border is served by 3 border crossing points (BCP). At least 3 other BCPs are needed to facilitate access for tourists from Greece to Pirin and the Rhodopes and tourists from Turkey to the Rhodopes, Strandja and the south Black Sea Coast. These are regions with great potential for eco-tourism. There are similar conditions and needs for developing BCPs along the west Bulgarian border. The infrastructure, services and territorial allocation of existing BCPs are unsatisfactory.

The Bulgarian road network includes approximately 40,000 kilometers of road, and more than 75% are categorized as low class (class III and IV). There are two band roads with a total width between 6.00 and 7.50 meters. The road network is unevenly allocated. In regions suitable for eco-tourism, the mountains and semi-mountains, border and rural areas, there is a lower average

density of roads and the roads are mostly class IV. Thus not only are the inter-settlement connections within the regions restricted, for example, in the Rhodopes and Stara Planina, but the access and use of roads is restricted during the winter. Provisions in national legislation provide for roads of this class to be maintained and developed by the municipalities. This is difficult since municipalities are currently not able to fulfill these obligations.

Over the last few years, efforts have concentrated on constructing transport corridors through Bulgaria that would provide better connections among various regions of the country. At the same time, completed road works cover basically the motorways and class I roads, while the adjoining road network that will be used for eco-tourism is underdeveloped and there are no maintenance funds. A lack of road signs, directing travelers to various locations is a significant problem. Out of the motorways and class I roads there are no boards and information provided in Latin letters. There are no special tourist signs, except for the Black Sea coast, where there are boards and signs guiding travelers to tourist sites. These signs have the same size, color and script as the standard road signs. The condition of the inter-settlement bus transport is of particular importance for eco-tourism with its high share of unorganized tourists and small groups. Restricted local routes and the dependence on poor road infrastructure is an impediment to eco-tourism development.

- ***Railway Transport***

The Bulgarian railway network consists of about 4 300 km tracks, 4 055 of which are standard (1,435 mm) and the rest are narrow gauge (960 mm). Only 22% of the entire network is double-tracked and about 61.4% electrified. The system includes about 400 railway stations and 300 railway stops. The use of radio communication is limited, and most of the information systems are not automated or computerized. The bad financial conditions of the national carrier “Bulgarian State Railways” National Company (BDZ), creates regular cut offs of trains and stations, primarily in the semi-mountain and mountain regions. This has a negative impact both on the general accessibility and the use of railway transport by tourists. A typical example of a conflict between interests is the line Septemvri – Dobrinishte. The BDZ cut off the number of trains along this line, reducing access to many starting points for eco-tourism in the Rhodopes, Rila and Pirin. This is a lost financial resource for this line, since its narrow tracks, retro-trains, and low speeds with views of picturesque nature and Alpine style stations would likely attract domestic and foreign tourists.

- ***Airports and Air Transport***

The country has 10 civil airports and four have international status. The airports are small but with recently improved infrastructure. Fees collected from airport operations go to the general national budget, making them unavailable for reconstruction of runway systems or adjoining airport infrastructure. For the time being air transport activity is concentrated in Sofia, Burgas, and Varna; however the Varna Airport is not suitable for airplanes with high passenger capacity. Over 95% of all flights from Bulgaria are to international destinations, and there are a number of charter flights to Bulgaria. Domestic flights are reduced to minimum because of high cost of operations and outdated planes. There may be positive changes with the new privatization contracts for the national air carrier Balkan Air Tour and legislative amendments addressing infrastructure and airport concessions.

- ***Ports and Water Transport***

Varna and Burgas, Bulgaria's main seaports, and the harbors in the smaller Black Sea towns, are capable of serving passengers although some facilities are outdated. There has been growing interest in constructing yacht ports. Only the Danube River is navigable, and cruise trips were partially restored in 2002 after being suspended because of the war in Yugoslavia and the resulting navigation problems. Currently the port of Russe is associated with eco-tourism, where the Danube cruise tours stop. This stop often includes a one-day trip to sites within Russenski Lom Nature Park. Improvements in port infrastructure in Vidin and Silistra would allow a similar opportunity, utilizing their proximity to the northwest Stara Planina, particularly the Srebarna reserve.

- ***Power and Heating Supply***

Of all engineered infrastructure that influences tourism development, the power supply and its condition causes the fewest problems. The lack of heating infrastructure in small settlements where eco-tourism services are offered does not have a direct negative impact on eco-tourism. Prices of heating are relatively high when electricity is used, and prices are increasing. Solid fuel causes environmental problems. Some towns and villages are searching for environmentally friendly heating alternatives. Hydrothermal stations are being investigated for Velingrad and Sapareva Banya.

- ***Water Supply, Sewage and Waste Management***

A water supply network services about 98% of Bulgaria's population. 4,517 towns and villages are serviced. This is 84.6% of all towns and villages (100% of the towns and 81.32% of the villages). Old water supply networks and water use regimes are the main problems in villages that provide eco-tourism services. Sewage problems are more serious as only 277 towns and villages have completed or partially completed sewage networks, and 2.1% of these are villages. In most village houses, wastewater is drained to septic pits with short channels. Waste management remains one of the most difficult environmental problems in small settlements. A national wastewater management strategy is being implemented, but it is beginning in the cities. In most cases, finding solutions to waste management problems is left to the local authorities and they lack the financial resources, and many lack the knowledge to correct their problems.

- ***Communications and Telecommunication Infrastructure***

The telecommunication network has relatively well developed infrastructure and services, a satisfactory pace of digitalization of the urban network, and partial availability of modern communication and information services concentrated in the big cities. The density of the national telephone network is 38%. The cellular phone network is concentrated in and around the big cities. There are considerable differences at the regional level. The development of local telecommunication networks in frontier and sparsely populated regions is insufficient. The quality of telecommunication services is low, and there are no digital telephone systems, Internet, and e-mail services. The postal network is widely developed. There are 3161 post offices in the country and each services an average 2,755 households. This is a very good ratio when compared with most of the European countries. However, the equipment and infrastructure is outdated and needs modernization.

- ***Town Development and Public Works***

The overall condition of urban areas, towns, and villages is very important for tourism, including eco-tourism. This includes cleanliness, lighting, and maintenance of sidewalks and green areas. Programs for temporary employment make considerable efforts at town development and public works; however these programs have low thresholds for the number of unemployed as related to the size of the population. This means that towns and villages with high unemployment and low population does not qualify for these programs. This situation combined with the lack of independent municipal budgets means there are few funds available for public works projects in villages.

- ***Public Health and Medical Services***

Over the last decades, public health system services have become geographically imbalanced in favor of the larger, urban regions of the country. There are few physicians, hospital beds and emergency specialists in rural areas. For example, there are no doctors in 1,931 villages in the mountains and rural areas. Medical officers handle emergency cases in these areas. The lack of good health care services can negatively affect tourism development.

2.4.2 Tourism Infrastructure

The Tourism Act defines tourist infrastructure as facilities for accommodation, lodging, catering and entertainment. The new Tourism Act and the Regulation for Categorization of Tourist sites has changed the categorization system in Bulgaria. The new system expands the range of sites subject to categorization. The change includes improved requirements for constructing, furnishing, and equipping sites, the provision of services, and the qualifications of staff. Accommodation sites: hotels, motels, holiday villages and tourist resorts; lodgings, recreation sites, family hotels, private rooms, villas, houses, cabins, camping sites and tourist chalets; catering and entertainment facilities, including restaurants, fast food restaurants, pubs, coffee-shops and bars are all now subject to categorization.

Under the Tourism Act categorization is carried out by the Minister of Economy or by the mayor of the municipality, depending on the type of site and the desired category. Categorization of a tourist site by the mayor is to be done within the first two months of the beginning the categorization procedure, and within three months for sites categorized by the Minister of Economy. The site is issued a temporary license for the duration of the categorization period. The classification of a tourist site is valid for a period of three years, with the option of an extension for no longer than two years with a shorter procedure for re-categorization.

The category structure and territorial distribution of specialized tourism infrastructure reflects some of the major weaknesses in the national tourism product. There is a limited diversification of tourism products, marked seasonality, territorial concentration of tourism development, low average length of stay, low average income per tourist, low income from accommodation and occupation, limited additional services, and a high share of low-category unmonitored accommodations. As of the end of January 2001, there were 556 hotels and similar facilities in Bulgaria that offer 101,000 beds, and 1,565 restaurants with 139,000 seats. According to National Statistical Institute data, the total number of beds is 209,000. However,

the actual capacity of the sector can be determined at 420,000 - 450,000 beds². Accommodation facilities are categorized by a star system, with 61% of the facilities in the low standard category of 1-2 stars and the medium category of 3 stars³.

This structure affects the economic performance of the tourist industry. The improvement of tourist facilities in recent years is palpable and has been accomplished by the private sector or by foreign investors, including investments for future services' scheme, used by some foreign tour operators. The share of seasonally operated facilities is high - 40% of all facilities and 50% of beds. Occupancy rates are very low, 26% as compared with 65% in 1985, even in hotels (30%). The highest share of occupancy, 33-37%, is in the high-category hotels (4 and 5 stars), with 37% occupancy in seaside resorts and 27% in the big cities. The lowest occupancy rates are in non-traditional tourism regions (13%), small mountain resorts (16%) and health resorts (22%).

2.4.3 Infrastructure for Eco-tourism Activities

In developing a national strategy, one of the most challenging aspects of developing and responding to tourism is the diversification of the industry. In the rush to accommodate the demands of the world's fastest growing industry, all manner of tourism activities are being developed and marketed. The experience in Bulgaria is no different, and the NETS must consider where the components of Bulgarian eco-tourism fit in this diverse portfolio of tourism activities. Notwithstanding this situation, there is a significant niche market of visitors who wish to experience nature and who actively seek opportunities to contribute and participate in activities that generate benefits for nature and people. There are three categories of tourist within the eco-tourism umbrella, and each has its followers and practitioners:

1. The eco-tourist with an interest in nature, local customs and tradition, who chooses to experience these aspects of Bulgaria on foot, in modest accommodations, with modern transport between destinations, and ample information and interpretation to heighten their appreciation of the experience.
2. The eco-tourist in search of adventure, extreme conditions, or sports associated with unusual or special destinations in nature. Often there is a personal physical challenge to the activity. This is the tourist who practices alternative forms of travel/sport, including para-gliding, bungee jumping, mountain biking, long-distance trekking with backpacks, horseback trips of multiple days, cave exploration, rock climbing, and/or rafting. For many of these tourists, the extreme experience is as gratifying as the nature or the local culture, but often the latter is background to the event.
3. The third type of eco-tourist is singularly interested in special aspects of their visit. They take their holidays to add to their semi-professional or professional knowledge. They focus avidly on a subject, and are in pursuit of very specific circumstances or experiences. This type of eco-tourist takes specialty trips for culinary purposes, wine production, wood carving, textiles, ethereal oils, natural history studies, including birding, botany, insects, mammals, geology, balneology, and/or specific music or musical instruments.

² Sustainable Urban Tourism: Framework Conditions, Agents and Factors influencing Participatory- Decision-Making, 2000

³ According to the register of categorized sites maintained by the Ministry of Economy, only 0.1% of hotels are 1 star, 49% - 3 stars, 40% - 3 stars, and about 10% - 4 and 5 stars.

The specialty infrastructure requirements of these types of eco-tourist still require definition. But apart from basic services for accommodation, health, emergencies, communication and transport, the eco-tourism infrastructure requirements are no more sophisticated or demanding than any other aspect of the tourism industry. They just need to be more equitably and widely distributed in the country. Key to eco-tourism infrastructure is planning and development conducted with respect for nature, landscapes, local customs and traditions. Rather than creating or adding to environmental problems, these forms of tourism are aimed at mitigating the negative impacts and stressing the positive. Consequently the infrastructure to support eco-tourism does not require major investment.

There are categories of rural eco-tourism infrastructure worth noting because they are addressed in the new Tourism Act. These include guesthouses or private houses, family hotels, and chalets. At present there is no reliable information about the number of beds in these types of lodging facilities. Statistics maintained by the National Statistical Institute are flawed. Family hotels are not monitored and information about private rooms includes only those serviced by tourist booking offices. Most often accommodation facilities are categorized and monitored by mayors of municipalities and there is no summarized data.

- ***Houses in rural areas (guest houses or private rooms)***

The domestic market and increasingly, the international market are turning to Bulgarian guesthouses as the main source of accommodation for eco-tourists. This interest is prompted by a combination of comfort and authenticity with coziness, but not luxury. Such facilities average between 2 and 3 rooms, and the average overnight costs are considered cheap and/or reasonable at 10-15 BGN per person per night. Major problems associated with these accommodations are the quality of service; poor communication, sometimes-difficult access, and utilities that not always up to normal standards. Toilet and bathroom facilities are among the most regularly criticized feature of these accommodations. Language is cited as a particular barrier for international visitors.

- ***Family hotels***

Family hotel businesses are one of the fastest growing sectors in Bulgarian tourism. The advantages of family hotels and lodgings for eco-tourism are the same as those of guesthouses, but their larger capacity allows them to provide services to groups of 12-15 people. At the same time, the provision of contemporary furniture and decoration, TV, piped music, and other modern amenities have been noted as detractors from the general quality and atmosphere of these accommodations. Costs per person per overnight are still attractive and average 20-25 BGN per person.

- ***Tourist chalets***

The Bulgarian Tourist Union has registered a total of 17,418 beds in 324 facilities, including 219 chalets with 13,062 beds, 26 shelters with 283 beds, 33 tourist houses with 2,394 beds, 33 tourist lodgings with 1,296 beds, and 13 camping sites with 383 beds. Because they receive no government subsidy and because of the lack of clearly defined ownership in many of these places, the conditions in the chalets are extremely unsatisfactory from the viewpoint of hygiene, comfort and environmentally friendly management practices. The Tourism Act and the special regulation for categorization set minimum requirements for the construction, furnishing, equipping, and the services in tourist chalets and catering facilities.

- ***Camping sites***

Camping sites are numerous and a lodging option for eco-tourism, but their condition in Bulgaria generally, does not allow their use. There is an absence of engineered infrastructure and poor quality of technical equipment. Many camps are poorly organized and services are poor. Maintenance is a significant problem.

- ***Holiday villages***

These facilities provide a higher quality accommodation and are typical in large resorts like Borovets, Pamporovo, and Albena. Their level of organization and service, and their location in natural surroundings make them suitable for links to eco-tourism development. Unlike other types of accommodation, holiday villages are meant for longer stays and higher average income per tourist.

- ***Visitor Infrastructure in Protected Areas***

Bulgaria has a relatively well developed network of protected areas that covers about 5% of the country's territory. Recent efforts to develop management plans for protected areas show positive trends in overall regulation, development and construction of visitors' infrastructure. These include outlining the borders and entrances, creating information or visitors centers, developing separate sites for interpretative activities, such as sites for observation of fauna and flora, creating specialized itineraries, and separate recreation sites and camping sites. Construction standards and presentation of information are improving and are slowly becoming part of a recognized national system. Communities around these protected areas are also benefiting from the information boards, visitor information centers, and directional signs located in their settlements.

- ***Hiking trails***

Bulgaria has a 37,000 km system of marked trails within and outside protected areas. This system is significant not only because hiking is a common eco-tourism activity, but because a trail system is necessary to developing inter-regional and international tourism products. The European itineraries E-3, E-4, and E-8 pass through Bulgaria's territory. However, there is a lack of separate recreation sites, entertainment equipment and bivouacs in Bulgaria that are now considered as obligatory elements in European practice. The summer and winter signs on Bulgaria's trail system are only regularly maintained within protected areas. Outside these areas most tourist associations in the Bulgarian Tourist Union system are unable to keep up their maintenance. A third problem is the absence of a national system of marking hiking trails. The BTU is responsible for marking the trails and its system does not reflect modern trends nor meet current international standards.

There is a new trend in Bulgaria for developing specialized trails, such as botanical and ornithological trails. There is a recently opened botanical trail in Rila National Park. Two nature parks have trails for disabled people. Sports and activities in natural surroundings are the focus for developing tracks/ trails for biking, mountain biking, and horse riding. Most use existing hiking itineraries that do not always provide the extreme conditions or panoramic views sought by tourists. More specialized trail profiles need to be developed with a view towards their functions and level of difficulty. Renting equipment is a service in support of these activities. Eco-adventure trails were created in several locations with the active involvement of local

communities and NGOs, and most popular are the Kroshunska, Trunska, Yagodinska eco-trails, created by BARET. These trails include elements of the natural environment and cultural and historical heritage, and aim at giving visitors a chance to experience a walking adventure.

- ***Shelters and Emergency Facilities***

The Mountain Rescue Service (MRS), as a division of the Bulgarian Red Cross, has a structure of 33 rescue teams stationed in the larger mountain settlements and employing 700 rescuers. According to the season, the visitation rate, the terrain and climatic conditions, the MRS opens and maintains up to 56 rescue units, stationed in Service facilities and in high-mountain chalets, where there are duty teams on holidays and on weekends. The MRS maintains year-round 24-hour rescue units in the large sports and tourist centers – Aleko, Borovets, Bansko, Studenets. A central, 24-hour unit operates year-round in Sofia.

- ***Infrastructure for Visitor Information and Interpretation outside Protected Areas***

Communities around the protected areas are also benefiting from the construction of information boards, directional signs, and visitor information centers. Most of the protected areas developed their system of information boards in settlements around their territories. This was done in partnership with the protected areas managers and local authorities. They have two main functions – to provide information to visitors of the protected area, and to build support and pride in local people about their protected area.

Some protected areas, such as Central Balkan National Park, are developing a real network of visitor centers in settlements around the Park, through partnerships with the local communities. They are using the existing system of cultural centers and “Chitalishte”. In partnership with local authorities, centers for conservation education that also provide interpretation and tourist information are being established.

- ***Infrastructure for Local Traditions, Crafts and Folklore***

Local traditions, crafts and folklore are an important element in the specific Bulgarian eco-tourism product. Although there is no systematic information about existing facilities, some can be listed.

There are 11 regional and 125 municipal museums that incorporate not only the historical features of the regions, but the ethnographic, crafts and cultural exhibit as well. Some were recently modernized and are beginning to develop programs for inter-active presentations of themes. Some are working closely with local schools and other cultural institutions to become market oriented and to turn the museums into tourist attractions. These efforts require some significant investments, but it is an important success.

The National Crafts Chamber has branches in most regional centers and big towns in the country. The Chamber comprises 25 local craft associations, and according to their last survey (2003). The Chamber has approximately 12,000 members. Most Association branches had their own shops in many towns throughout Bulgaria. These closed in the beginning of the 1990's because they couldn't survive market reforms. However over the past two-three years, some have reopened and new independent local crafts associations are appearing with a better marketing approach.

There are 6 specialized high schools for applied arts and folklore in the country. They represent important focal points for developing this aspect of the eco-tourism. These high schools are located in Sofia, Troyan, Tryavna, Sliven (applied arts), and in Shiroka Luka and Kotel (music). Music divisions were also established in Pleven and Varna.

The network of cultural centers, or Chitalishte, has a high potential for eco-tourism development. They are traditional centers for information sharing, for local cultural and public awareness, and centers for specialized training in folklore and crafts. There are a total of 4000 Chitalishte in the country – almost one in each settlement. Some Chitalishte have already begun programs in nature conservation education in partnership with protected areas.

- ***Infrastructure for Mountain Access***

Access to Bulgaria's mountains is a major part of eco-tourism development. Most access to national parks is restricted to road heads from which access to the parks is by foot. Chair lifts, gondolas, and roads, however, make high mountain areas in national parks more accessible. There are environmental impacts associated with these types of access, and developing new access points with minimal environmental impacts must be addressed in new protected area plans and municipal plans. Nature parks allow easier access, as their territories tend to be a combination of state forest enterprise road networks, municipal territories, and private lands. Road access is often difficult but available. Elsewhere mountain access is feasible, but not advised for people who do not know the area and are not familiar with the roads. Road markings in protected territories tend to be up-to-date and accurate, while most other road access is without signage.

- ***Infrastructure on State Forestry Lands***

There is a diversity of well-developed hunting facilities in areas of high conservation value in Bulgaria that could include eco-tourism. There are 118 forestry enterprises and 49 offer hunting tourism⁴. They all have the necessary infrastructure: towers, shelters, observation points, and points for taking photos. The present infrastructure includes more 110 hunting chalets and lodges with more than 1100 beds. Most of the facilities are in the average or high quality category.

2.4.4 Visitor Centers

There are 45 visitors centers associated with protected areas or eco-tourism destinations in the country (*Appendix 2*). Many were established with, and are maintained either with financial support of different donor organizations, or with the cooperation of local tourist organizations, municipal authorities or NGOs. The main scope of their work is to popularize nature conservation in their area. The main activities of visitor centers' are:

- **Conservation education programs** – protected areas visitors centers are developing and implementing specialized conservation education programs for children and adults. The centers also provide interpretation services to visitors.
- **Information tourist services** – Visitors centers provide free information about tourist sites, companies, organized events, and information about the region as a whole and the corresponding municipality.

⁴ Based on 2000 data

- **Marketing and advertising** – Centers prepare and distribute advertising materials, participate in tourism fairs in the country, and promote new tourism products.
- **Analysis of tourist demand** – Visitor centers are used as a tool for analyzing tourist demand, through direct contact with visitors. Questionnaires or surveys are conducted to show tourist behavior.
- **Data base development** – development of local/regional tourism data base that can be used for developing and refining tourism policies and as an advertising tool (though access to Internet).
- **Reservation services** – this function is still very poor developed. The recently adopted Non-profit Legal Entities Act set out provisions for independent commercial activity of centers. Tourist agents license fee and conflict of interest of some members of the organization (tourist associations) are sometimes an obstacle.

All of these centers face two major challenges. First, they have not organized as a network, which would allow them to exchange information and share clients effectively. Second, they usually do not have legal status. This prohibits them from implementing economic activities and developing as self-sustaining institutions.

2.5 Market Trends in Eco-tourism

2.5.1 Domestic Market Trends

The Bulgarian domestic tourism market has increased over the last two or three years. It is a classical example of supply and demand, and is characterized by stratification in different market niches, including eco-tourism. A little more than 1 million Bulgarians, aged 18 and more, traveled on holiday during 2001. Most have a college degree or higher and live in Sofia or in its district towns. Most spent their summer holiday at the Black Sea coast, one quarter of them traveled to the mountains, and the rest spent their holiday in other resorts. The most typical holiday activities are visiting restaurants and cafés, excursions, and participating in different sports. The dominant factors for choosing these destinations are: the presence of fresh air, peace and quiet, the sea, and beautiful beaches. In 2003, Bulgarians spent 330 million leva on travel within Bulgaria.

There has been only one detailed market survey on eco-tourism, conducted in 2002. While it only shows results from 2001, it is important information to consider in eco-tourism development. In 2001, 71.4% of the people who participated in the survey traveled for leisure or went on holiday. The survey identified a group of between 140,000 to 180,000 Bulgarian travelers that is the most likely to participate in eco-tourism activities. Most of them live in Sofia and the bigger towns and cities. These tourists took:

- 300,000 leisure trips with a duration of 1-3 overnights, for a total of 600,000 overnights. With an average overnight price of 10 leva, 7,000,000 leva was spent annually on accommodations.
- 170,000 trips from 4 to 6 overnights, for a total of 850,000 overnights. Assuming an average price of 10 leva/overnight, this travel generated 8,500,000 leva for the year.
- 180,000 trips with 7 overnights, for a total of 1,260,000 overnights and an annual revenue of 12,600,000 leva

The Bulgarian eco-tourism target group spent at least 28,100,000 leva on accommodations in one year. This turnover includes all types of trips, not just trips with eco-tourism destinations. These numbers reflect considerable development in the domestic travel market. The Bulgarian eco-tourist target group has the following profile:

- 25-40 years of age
- Minimum monthly income of 600 BGN
- Minimum of a university degree
- Urban residents – mostly residents of Sofia
- Married, without children
- High proportion own and manage their own businesses
- High proportion have their own villa
- High proportion own and use a computer at home
- Regularly engage in some type of sport
- Majority own vehicles

During their travel they go hiking, skiing, visit churches and monasteries. The leading criteria for choosing a destination are: an expressed interest in natural landmarks, attractive scenery, and sports opportunities. This group has the greatest potential for showing an interest in eco-tourism product because:

- The activities members of this group engage in, as well as their criteria for choosing a destination, are similar to the standards of eco-tourism
- The group displays a very high level of interest in tourist products associated with protected areas, and a willingness to buy and use them once they are available
- This group shows a high degree of sensitivity to nature conservation

The results of the whole survey reinforced the following conclusions:

1. The domestic eco-tourism market is just beginning to develop
2. Tourist products offered are based upon natural features of destinations and no effort is made to make them a marketable tourist product more in line with customer expectations
3. The role and the function of tour operators and tourist agents is marginal
4. Trips that include paid overnights constitute a little over half of all trips taken
5. The level of customer satisfaction is low for accommodation and catering services

This limited data indicates there is a large potential for eco-tourism in the domestic market, and the private sector has not fully recognized this potential.

Circuits and Itineraries

There is little systematic information about the main features of the Bulgarian eco-tourism market and products. There are some examples that, to a great degree, summarize the current situation. The main eco-tourism regions in Bulgaria are the mountains of Pirin, Rila, the Rhodopes, the Central Balkans, Strandja, Predbalkan, and Vitosha; protected areas with particular species, mainly birds and plants, and some regions in the plains and smaller mountains with natural landmarks and biodiversity.

As mentioned previously, there are two types of eco-tourism programs: a) very specialized programs that include bird watching and watching of wildlife and plants, and b) mixed programs in which eco-tourism elements are complemented by adventure and cultural elements. The duration of most trips is three days to two weeks. The programs are seasonal

and consider the weather and the biological cycle of local species. There are some year round programs, but the high season in Bulgaria is from May to October. The most popular destinations are the Central Balkans, primarily the national park and surrounding area; northern Pirin; northwest Rila; the southern part of the western Rhodopes; the region of Madjarovo, and protected areas along the Black Sea coast.

Guides lead most trips and are often accompanied by another expert. The trips can include hiking, riding bicycles, or driving automobiles. A sample 7–10-day program might include a visit to at least two mountains, for example Rila and Pirin or Balkan Mountains and the Rhodopes, and a visit to one or more cultural sites, such as the old town of Plovdiv, Rila Monastery, or Melnik. Accommodation is usually in family hotels and guesthouses, but mountain chalets and bigger hotel are also used. The objective is to offer a complete package and accommodation includes breakfast or all meals. Transportation is often included in the trip price. The groups vary in size from 2 to 15 people.

There is no certification or labeling of eco-tourism products in Bulgaria, nor is there a national practice of discussing product quality standards or establishing standards for environmentally friendly or green services and products. There is no practice of providing special insurance with the tourist services. Just recently the mountain rescue service has begun to offer special insurance policies, but tour operators do not include them in their packages.

Links with Mass tourism

Links between mass tourism and eco-tourism have been developed primarily on the initiative of big tour operators working in the mass tourism market. They try to diversify their products and satisfy the needs of their clients. Tour operators in the tourist complexes along the Black Sea coast, and some ski resorts offer trips to natural, cultural and historical landmarks, and ethnographic and folklore attractions outside the resorts (**Appendix 6**). Some of these attractions include eco-tourism sites; for example a trip from Pamporovo to the caves or the rock formations and architectural sites in the Rhodopes. Other examples are trips from the seaside resorts to the villages and reserves in Strandja Mountain Nature Park, to the Nature Conservation Center in Poda near Burgas, or boat trips along the Veleka and Ropotamo rivers.

The various market segments have not taken advantage of opportunities for mutual enrichment and benefits. Big tour operators include well-known and well-developed tourist attractions regardless of the fact that they are not so new or original. Tour operators do not invest in developing new itineraries. On the other hand, eco-tourism providers have not found the most appropriate way to offer their services and attractions with the needed quality and marketing to increase their mass tourism clients. These combined trips require some compromises in eco-tourism standards, since the majority of the financial benefits leave the local communities and the tourist groups are larger than those from just an eco-tourism trip. Yet these links can be stimulate establishing and maintaining high quality eco-tourism products.

2.5.2 *International Market Trends*

Eco-tourism is a small niche within the larger nature tourism or sustainable tourism market. The International Eco-tourism Society (TIES)⁵ has created a profile of eco-tourists:

- Age: 35 to 54
- Income: \$50,000 and above
- Predominantly college educated or greater (more than 80%)
- Couples and families
- 50% male and 50% female
- Household composition: no major differences between general tourists and experienced eco-tourists
- Party composition: 60% of experienced eco-tourists prefer to travel as a couple, 15% prefer to travel with other experienced eco-tourists, and 13% prefer to travel alone
- 50% of experienced eco-tourists stay longer on trips than general tourists, with an average stay of 8-14 days
- Expenditure: experienced eco-tourists spend more money on trips - 26% are willing to spend \$1,001 - \$1,500 per trip
- Important Elements: experienced eco-tourists cited three things 1) wild nature 2) wildlife watching 3) hiking/trekking
- Motivations for the next trip include 1) enjoy scenery/nature 2) new experiences/places

Eco-tourism is a growing sector of the tourism market. World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimates show that in 1997, 595 million international travelers spent \$425 billion USD. Nature tourism generates 7% of all international travel expenditures (Lindbergh, 1997). The World Resources Institute (1990) found that the annual overall tourism growth is of 4% while nature travel increases 10% to 30% every year. The number of international tourists is expected to increase an average of 4.3% per year over the next 20 years, and travel expenditures will increase by 6.7% every year. In recent years cultural tourism has developed as one of the most successful tourist sectors in different countries throughout the world. The number of tourists motivated by culture and cultural heritage is constantly growing. Particularly relevant are cultural itineraries that offer complete packages with diverse types of cultural heritage and natural landmarks, combined with well-developed tourist information and transportation infrastructure.

There are opportunities for dynamic growth in the eco-tourism potential market. Bulgaria would benefit greatly by developing quality services to participate in this market.

Marketing surveys show the appearance of a new generation of responsible tour operators. They have linked together or have joined groups associated with their country of origin or the types of destinations they market. 150 tour operators have joined the Association of Independent Tour operators (AITO), in Great Britain, and 80 small-scale tour operators are members of FORUM ANDERS REISEN in Germany. Both organizations have developed a business strategy, a database, promotion campaigns, and a code of ethics for travelers. 15 French adventure and hiking tourism operators work jointly with North African destinations in the Sahara region. At present they are conducting a clean desert campaign and implementing a program of cleaning campsites and publishing a leaflet. A new type of cooperation is developing based on the idea of "fair tourism". Tourism Concern has

⁵ Source: The International Eco-tourism Society, 1997

developed an international network of Fair Commercial Relations in Tourism. The Fair Tourism Charter developed by French NGOs and tour operators is based on the principle of fair trade that requires:

- Mutually beneficial and equal cooperation with local communities and service providers
- Fair salaries and good working conditions
- Development of local businesses managed by local people in good managerial positions

A new generation of eco-tourism products is being tested on the market. These are products based on participation and holidays and include:

- Sharing and experiencing the culture and local traditions
- Familiarization trips
- Voluntary work on environmental projects, eco-solidarity, eco-enthusiasm, research, and monitoring
- Funding local community development and conservation projects

Some eco-tourism products are defined by the key words respect and responsibility:

- Improving the living conditions of local providers of services – for example the porters in Nepal
- Limiting environmental impacts.

Eco-tourism still uses the traditional marketing techniques of personal recommendation, catalogues, and agencies. Yet, small companies with small advertising budgets tend to use targeted promotion channels such as specialized regional trade fairs and venues, the Internet, and specialized magazines (**Appendix 7**). Specialized fairs include:

- Alternative Tourism, Reise Pavillon, Hanover, Germany
- Organic Food Fair, Lyon, France
- Responsible Tourism, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Traditional national tourism fairs, such as the ITB Berlin, WTM London, FITUR Madrid, are developing workshops, conferences and other events on sustainable tourism.

Reise Pavillon

Reise Pavillon is an innovator among trade fairs and has been organized for 12 years. It is hosted by the city of Hanover, Germany. It is a unique international mixture of travel fair, exhibition, conference and public information on the subject of sustainable tourism. Its objectives are:

- Presentations and training for small and medium enterprises
- Making the ideas of sustainable tourism understandable for tourists and professionals
- Highlighting the special attractiveness of sustainable tourism - Travel the “alternative” way and have more fun!

The main achievements of Reise Pavillon over the past 12 years have been:

- An increase in the number of exhibitors, presentations and visitors since 1991
- Critical exchange of information and ideas among tourists, different sectors of the tourism industry, and the media
- Creation of Forum Anders Reisen in 1998, an alliance of small and medium tour operators

- Different national and international awards like the Award for Best Conservation Practice” from the World Wildlife Fund
- Launching the consumer campaign VISIT, whose goal is to create more transparency in tourism eco-labels at the European level

Familiarization trips or travel workshops

Outbound travel operators are invited to stay with local providers who solicit their expert opinion on their services and develop new packages based on equity and partnership. The objectives of the familiarization trip is to:

- Acquaint international tour operators with the destination and product
- Visit places of interest
- Cooperate with local tour operators and service providers
- Establish business relations

Individual Internet Sites

The Internet is a widely used tool for promoting tourism packages. People can:

- Obtain information and brochures on-line
- Make reservations on-line
- Provide feedback and obtain other customer oriented services

The Internet has been shown to be the best way to promote eco-tourism and sell eco-tourism products. Seven of the countries studied by the WTO are among the 15 top markets for 60% of all Internet users worldwide.

3. Situation Analysis – Eco-tourism and Bulgaria

The present situation of eco-tourism in Bulgaria was assessed using the SWOT Analysis: an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, associated with this economic sub-sector. Supporting documentation for this Analysis can be found in the Appendices.

3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

This analysis examines the strengths of the eco-tourism sub-sector in Bulgaria. These are positive elements that can be relied on for the strategic development of this sub-sector. The analysis also provides an assessment of eco-tourism's associated weaknesses in the country. Weaknesses are, in essence, a "needs assessment" and should be addressed as part of NETS.

3.1.1 Resources

Strengths

Unique and Internationally Significant Nature and Culture - Bulgaria is increasingly known internationally for its special combinations of natural and cultural heritage, and most Bulgarians take great pride in their natural and cultural heritage. Conservation and cultural identity are particularly strong in rural areas. Experts in this field hold Bulgaria's natural and cultural diversity in esteem. With nine sites of World Heritage importance - seven cultural and two natural; thousands of local cultural and traditional attractions, and 5% of the national territory in protected area status, Bulgaria has an attractive network of natural and cultural resources. Moreover this resources diversity is concentrated in a small area, making many areas accessible in short periods of time. The combination of the high percentage of protected areas, the high numbers and diversity of cultural sites, and the diversity of traditional practices and livelihoods provide Bulgaria with a strong competitive advantage in promoting sustainable development and implemented through eco-tourism.

Landscapes of Cultural and Natural Importance and Attractiveness - Historical patterns of human activity are dramatically and attractively combined in many of Bulgaria's natural landscapes. While most of Europe is actively working to restore landscapes lost over the last century, in particular, many of Bulgaria's landscapes are unique combinations of natural and cultural heritage and traditional practices. Many of these landscape traits form distinctive regions, characterized by a specific identity, customs, agriculture, and products. Each region represents unique eco-tourism destinations.

Favorable Climate, Waters and Location - Bulgaria enjoys a temperate climate and is favorably influenced by Mediterranean weather. A general abundance and variety of water resources, including mineral springs, provide domestic and international supply and a host of opportunities for rest and recreation.

Weaknesses

Unsustainable Agricultural and Forestry Practices - There is still a significant gap between biodiversity conservation as practiced within the protected areas network, and how biodiversity conservation is addressed in agriculture and forest production systems. Both

systems are important parts of Bulgaria's sustainable development agenda. Sustainable agriculture and forestry practices are critical to eventual organic certification for agriculture and forest production – both labels carrying higher prices and higher profiles on international markets. Guidelines and demonstration models for these practices are still under development in Bulgaria, and require further support and development.

Emigration and Embarrassment - There are several aspects detracting from a national sense of pride and preservation of national traditions and customs. Many traditions associated with rural practices are being lost with the death of Bulgaria's older generations. Traditions and customs are being lost through massive immigration from rural areas to cities, for employment and lifestyle change. Land husbandry practices important to maintaining newly restituted private land and biodiversity conservation are being lost and the consequences are still not clear.

A second aspect impinging on a productive eco-tourism industry is Bulgarians' anxiety about appearing backward and uncivilized in the eyes of visitors. Many hosts in rural areas are worried about how they and their practices are perceived by outsiders. As Bulgaria moves towards membership in the EU, it may be losing sight of the value of its core nature and culture that make it unique”

Absence of Protected Area Management Plans and Management Skills - Only a few protected area management plans have been completed for the country's national network. While there are clear objectives linking protected areas to local community tourism development, there are few practical policy guidelines on how this can be accomplished. Most management plans, and most protected area managers do not have the requisite tools and skills to guide eco-tourism development in partnership with local communities.

Inadequate Inventories of Tourist Resources - There is no consistent record, and only irregularly collected inventories of existing tourism resources inside and outside of protected areas with a potential for eco-tourism activities.

Lack of Interpretative Programs - There are limited interpretative programs in protected areas and at cultural and historical heritage sites. Interpretation is an important tool to introduce eco-tourism products and develop it in local and international markets.

3.1.2 Policy

Strengths

There are four important elements of national policy that further the goals of eco-tourism development. These are:

Comprehensive Environmental Management Policies - Positive policy developments are reflected in strategies for: environmental management, water management, and biodiversity conservation. Important complements to these strategies are the new Environment Protection Act, the Biodiversity Act, the Protected Areas Act, the Medicinal Plants Act, and the Water Act. In addition, the government is developing a National Forestry Management Strategy, a Cultural Tourism Strategy, and is making changes to the Forestry Act.

National Program for Territorial Planning - There is a National Plan for Regional Development for 2000-2006, and regional plans are augmented by municipal development plans. These are significant land use planning and economic development tools for regional and local governments.

National Strategies Guiding Economic Development - The National Plan for Economic Development – 2000-2006, and the Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises are tools that guide government priorities for economic development. This eco-tourism strategy will complement these existing tools and reinforce the goals of economic growth in the poorer regions of the country. The Tourism Act is another tool guiding sector development and reform.

Decentralization and Local Government Reform - Government decentralization assigns the mandates and responsibilities of good governance to the local level. Local government reform aims to create conditions for revenue collection and expenditure decentralization. It includes tangible increases in citizen participation and democratic processes in decision making. These are all positive for eco-tourism development because decentralization and local government engagement in eco-tourism is key to its success. Product development, services, and infrastructure support are subsequently more closely linked to where they originate and are needed. Successful eco-tourism models throughout the world illustrate the importance of linking eco-tourism development to strong local government engagement, support, and financing.

Weaknesses

Lack of a National Tourism Policy - Tourism has been identified as a priority sector in the country's economy, but there is still no tourism national strategy. Many municipalities are looking to tourism as a development and income generation tool, but lack the policy framework to structure this growth at the local level. Bulgaria is ready to articulate a sustainable tourism development strategy, including eco-tourism as a key element. In the absence of a formal tourism strategy, the current tourism strategy is based on growth, a strong private sector, but little in the way of environmental management systems and sustainability. Bulgaria is still known primarily as an attractive destination offering inexpensive holidays, based on high volumes of visitors. The new national tourism strategy must examine this growth with respect to the nation's capacity to sustain it. Bulgaria has a real opportunity to create a new market identity based upon Bulgaria's competitive advantages, and to market Bulgaria at the forefront of responsible and affordable tourism. Eco-tourism can contribute. In the absence of this identity, Bulgaria will lag behind her regional neighbors, and risks being perceived as just another cheap holiday destination.

Poor Integration of Tourism and Eco-tourism Strategies in National, Regional and Municipal Development Plans - There have been inadequate efforts to broaden the definitions of tourism in national and regional development plans. There is little national consensus on sustainable tourism and how the development plans address sustainability. There is no clear consensus on prioritizing sustainable forms of tourist development, nor appropriate funding and investment initiatives. The topic of eco-tourism is relatively new for Bulgaria, hence there has not been much attention given to eco-tourism and sustainable tourism in the regional and local development plans. In the absence of clear tourism development policy and guidelines, there are inadequate investments in infrastructure linked to rural tourism development in the country.

Inadequate Programs Addressing Rural Eco-tourism Development - Despite new legislation, there are few specific targets for rural, community-based eco-tourism development. For example, there are no provisions for small family eco-tourism/tourism development, and no modern legislation for the protection of cultural and historical heritage at local levels. There are no mechanisms that secure interaction between the government and small, local businesses, and that in turn, provide financial resources for protecting natural and cultural heritage locally.

Slow Progress on Decentralization - Local government reform still lags behind in Bulgaria. There is still the need for capacity building, and organizational and institutional growth. Local governments continue to practice democratic processes, to develop more effective communication tools, practice strategic planning, and engage in public-private sector dialog. Perhaps the biggest challenge to effective local government reform remains reform of local government financing, and the associated accountability necessary for local government revenue collection and expenditure.

3.1.3 Government Institutions

Strengths

National and Nature Parks Have Taken a Lead Role in Eco-tourism Development - State environmental management institutions are taking an increasingly important role in the development of eco-tourism activities as a conservation tool. In the development and implementation of management plans for the nation's protected areas network, eco-tourism is becoming a focus for private-public enterprise linked to local communities. State institutions are also practicing eco-tourism and some protected area managers have taken responsibility for its planning, execution and maintenance. Increasingly, national and nature parks management teams are assuming responsibility for the planning and management of tourism in their territories, for partnerships with local communities, and the development of eco-tourism around the parks. Parks are developing plans to create new destinations, services, and visitor features, while at the same time, attempting to limit the negative impacts of these developments. Some parks have taken the lead in sustainable tourism development by setting limits of acceptable use and implementing monitoring systems to determine their success. They are also working with communities to do the same.

Coordination Among Key Ministries on Eco-tourism - There are at least five Ministries who are legally positioned to affect the future of eco-tourism development in the country. The interdisciplinary nature of this sub-sector requires the collaborative efforts of MOEW, MOAF, MOC, MRDPW, led by the Ministry of Economy. Coordination among these Ministries has been established through a cooperative agreement between the MOEW, MOAF and MOE developed in October 2002. Both the MOC and the MRDPW are prepared to engage in this cooperative venture, in order to integrate eco-tourism into national and local plans and budgets better. Regional governors and municipal councils have similar interests.

Recognition of Eco-tourism as an Important Economic Development Tool - The concept of eco-tourism has strong national, institutional appeal in part because of the popular elements it addresses, and in part because it is seen as a business at a scale that most people can grasp. In addition, conservation and development agencies see eco-tourism as a rural development tool, particularly attractive in an era of significant rural emigration, high unemployment, declining agricultural production, and a declining rural tax base. Local municipal authorities have the

mandate and the power to plan and implement activities for eco-tourism development. Many local strategies for economic development have outlined tourism as a priority.

Extensive Experience and Interest in Protecting Cultural and Historical Heritage - Bulgaria has a wealth of experience in protecting cultural and historical heritage. Institutions working on the protection of this heritage have extensive experience and expertise in this area. Bulgarian cultural institutions are prepared to work more closely on developing itineraries and protecting sites, traditions, and cultural practices linked to regional destinations and cooperation.

Weaknesses

Lack of Ministerial Expertise on Eco-tourism - Despite its appeal and the rationale for eco-tourism as a major part of a sustainable tourism development strategy there are no governmental institutions, including the Ministry of Economy, that possess expertise, or a specialized unit for this sub-sector. Consequently, there is little coordination, organization and management of eco-tourism within Ministries, or between them. The absence of the expertise and the absence of regular sharing among Ministries on matters related to eco-tourism can be seen as an impediment to support and growth of the sector. There are few, if any experts in eco-tourism, let alone tourism, employed within government agencies at local or national level.

Cooperation between agencies is still new. There is a need to address the varieties and forms of this sub-sector through practical working arrangements between state agencies so that responsibilities and roles are clear. In the absence of coordination, regions rich in natural, cultural and historical heritage are failing to collaborate on important destination, infrastructure improvement and funding proposals. At the moment, relationships between cultural tourism and eco-tourism are rare and spontaneous. They do not result from carefully planned strategies. Too often the integration of tourism sub-sectors and their synergistic effects are not realized.

Lack of Information on Economic Contribution of Eco-tourism - There is no effective monitoring of the growth of eco-tourism. Neither national government agencies or local municipalities, where registration of local tourism/eco-tourism enterprises take place, have a grasp of the size of this sub-sector, its growth trends, and its potential for contributing to local and national economic growth. Thus the scale of this emerging sub-sector remains largely outside of normal government growth monitoring and planning efforts. For the most part, eco-tourism is currently an informal growth sector.

Lack of Appreciation for Social and Economic Importance of Eco-tourism by Regional and Local Government - Regional and district governors and municipal authorities often do not recognize the values of eco-tourism as a tool for social and economic development of their regions. The scale of eco-tourism development is typically not big enough to warrant attention, and many authorities are busy trying to attract major industries and activities that represent large increases in employment and a significant jump in revenue. Eco-tourism as a sub-sector is characterized by a multitude of small investors and businesses. Realistically, it still only represents relatively small employment centers, and only marginal revenue generation for local government. The perception is that eco-tourism is more time-consuming and costly to monitor and to assist – in-other-words, the benefits do not outweigh the costs. Time and time again however, eco-tourism has demonstrated its effectiveness in registering growth and benefits where none existed before. It has also demonstrated its value in rural areas where large-scale employment, industry, and mass tourism are not realistic options. The absence of credible

information on values and advantages of this sub-sector hurts its record of performance. This is often why eco-tourism is not part of regional and local development strategies.

Weak or Non-existent Mechanisms to Limit Resource Deterioration - Establishment and enforcement of "limits of acceptable use" within protected areas, and at sites of cultural and traditional importance are still weak. To date, Bulgaria has not really been confronted by a significant deterioration of its resources by over use. But with growing numbers of tourists to the country, and growing numbers of visitors to resources of national and international importance, Bulgaria must be able to use practical mechanisms to ensure these same resources are not negatively impacted.

Absence of Eco-tourism in Bulgaria's Education System - Eco-tourism has yet to occupy a serious place within formal education. The subject of eco-tourism in business training, tourism training, and vocational training, is generally absent. In recent years there has been some progress due only to active interest shown by some teachers. It is becoming essential to include eco-tourism as a specialized program in the tourism curriculum in high schools, vocational schools, and universities.

3.1.4 Infrastructure and Services

Strengths

Eco-tourism has Basic Infrastructure Needs - Fortunately, eco-tourism development does not require any unusual investment in infrastructure. Most eco-tourism development can be successful with moderate levels of infrastructure investment. Rural road access, utility service improvement, and signage are needed for eco-tourism development and bring even greater benefits to rural development.

Private Sector Investment in the Service Sector - There are a growing number of public and private sector service providers appearing in the country. Perhaps nowhere is this evidenced more clearly than in the expansion of the primary road system (with EU support), petrol and gas stations throughout the country; and in the growing geographical coverage of cell phone communication systems.

Weaknesses

Existing Infrastructure is Inadequate - Rural solid waste management, the removal of decrepit and ugly infrastructure, and second, third and fourth-class road rehabilitation remain the biggest challenges to rural development in Bulgaria. Until infrastructure issues are addressed in a concerted national effort, they will remain serious detractors to the growth of eco-tourism in the country.

Poor Visitor Services - While private sector service providers are filling important gaps in the communication and transport network, there are still no foreign language services, road signs and maps, and other easy to use domestic and foreign visitor services.

Lack of Appropriate and Dependable Information System - Databases that serve national and regional information and reservation systems are incomplete. Despite advances in the number of computers and computer users, there is no accurate, up-to-date, dependable information system for services, goods, and sites related to eco-tourism development readily available to

the public. The number of Internet providers in rural areas is still relatively small per capita, and rural communities find it difficult, if not impossible to access, market, and respond to domestic and foreign queries about eco-tourism services, reservations, accommodation.

3.1.5 Private Sector

Strengths

Private Investment in Tourism and Eco-tourism is Increasing - Fiscal stabilization, banking reform, privatization, and a growing small and medium enterprise sector have supported business development and investments in the tourism sector over the last 5 years. Tourism is becoming a major revenue generator for Bulgaria, and private sector investments and operations are leading the way. While these remain largely focused on the mass tourism markets of the Black Sea coast and mountain ski resorts, there is a growing number of family and small business tourism ventures appearing throughout the country. Although studies are still inconclusive in Bulgaria, it is clear from international experience that eco-tourism leaves a higher percentage of each euro or dollar in the country, per capita, than does mass tourism.

Eco-tourism Development and Marketing Efforts are Growing - There are a growing number of eco-tourism clusters expanding throughout the country. These include destination towns and villages such as Kovatchevitsa/Leshten, Momchilovtsi, Troyan-Apriltsi, Bratsigovo, Belogradchik, Arbanassi, Chepalare, Shiroka Luka, and Melnik. These centers are increasingly home to new family hotel investments, medium hotel –size investments, and year-round accommodations. Some would argue that expansion in some of these towns and villages is too much and happening too quickly – that the very qualities these towns preserve are being lost to exploitation without conservation and concern for the future.

In some instances these towns are the focal points for private money re-invested in summer villas or villages – i.e. Kovatchevitsa, Leshten, Ribartitsa, Apriltsi, and others. In other instances, investments are focused on traditional, mostly rural cultural destinations, i.e., Bozhentsi, Arbanassi, and Koprivshitsa – centers of traditional architecture and the arts. Almost all these destinations capitalize on their proximity to other cultural sites and, equally important, to areas of physical and natural beauty.

Local service providers in rural communities, and especially those around protected areas, are beginning to expand their offerings in response to market demand. Widely scattered throughout the country, these providers are realizing the benefits of concentrated, cooperative ventures. As the variety of their services increases they are no longer limited just to accommodation and catering. These groups are demonstrating that they are capable of organizing business and offering products without much government and donor support. These regional groups are beginning to form the basis of a truly national network of eco-tourism practitioners. With outside assistance, increasing numbers of eco-tourism/tourism associations are developing regional marketing strategies and materials. These can be seen most readily in the areas of Pirin, the Rhodopes, Stara Planina, and Veliko Turnovo.

Another growing market is the day-visit/over-night destinations favored by package tourists to the sea or ski resorts. Increasingly, mass tourism service providers are diversifying their products. They are beginning to package and sell visits to sites of cultural, natural and traditional interest away from large hotels. There are several Bulgarian tour operators who are packaging and selling eco tourism products and Bulgaria as a destination. Business relations

with their international counterparts remain at a very small scale; but Bulgaria has begun to emerge on the international market as an eco-tourism destination.

There are models for eco-tourism development spread throughout the country. Some of the more effective models have been created in association with protected areas and with donor support. These models are a source of many lessons. These pilot areas can serve as a starting point for the experimental implementation of an eco-tourism strategy.

Donor Programs are Supporting Efforts to Develop Small and Medium-sized Businesses - Business Centers and business incubators are developing with support from a number of donor programs in the country. They too have adopted a supporting role for tourism and in particular, eco-tourism development and marketing. They are designing tailored courses, business advice, and marketing services to evolving tourism business. While they make little distinction in the sector of tourism, the majority of their clients are small, family businesses that find it difficult to market their goods and services individually.

Weaknesses

Investors, including Banks, View Eco-tourism as a Risky Investment - Private sector experience with eco-tourism remains fragile and limited. As with any emerging business sector, there are many rewards from taking risks, but the scale of risk is unacceptable to most rural, small businesses. Investments made in the absence of a sound marketing strategy, in the absence of a clear client base, and with poorly defined products only increase the risk. While regional, private business coalitions are working to decrease this risk, there is still little provision for a whole range of support, such as incentives, guarantees, subsidized/free business advisory services, and soft loans.

There is also some risk stemming from “pseudo eco-tourism”, where culture, traditions, and nature are marketed without any re-investment and without any conscience.

Lack of Consistent Technical Assistance and Information Programs - Almost all regional eco-tourism initiatives start without sufficient knowledge and skills for operating in a competitive sector. Basic information for engaging in the eco-tourism business is not provided with any regularity by government, business advisory services, or national business/eco-tourism associations. Helpful business development information is not packaged in any particular form for popular consumption. While there have been several initial efforts to provide basic information, education and awareness in various forms, most are still ad hoc, short-lived, and not always tailored to the needs of rural communities. These services are not widely shared beyond donor-sponsored project areas.

Few Incentives for Small Business Development - Despite good intentions and new tourism legislation, there are few incentives afforded owners of small eco-tourism family businesses. Administrative procedures are tedious, if appropriate at all. Registration as a tour operator is restrictive. Access to development capital is extremely difficult, and there is seldom the expertise available to develop business plans for even the most basic loans.

Poor Business Practices - A handful of successful Bulgarian eco-tour operators do not have sufficient time and resources to run a business and to instruct others in development of the industry. They are more eager to ensure dependability of the product; consequently they tend to dictate price, policy and practices at rural eco-tourism destinations. This is simply a

practical effort to provide quality control and profit margins on a relatively small annual turnover. For the most part, Bulgarian tour operators are not sufficiently organized and consolidated to capitalize on contacts with successful, foreign, eco-tourism tour operators, and to forge closer business relations for Bulgaria.

Eco-tourism operator offerings on the domestic market are extremely limited. Domestic eco-tourism itineraries appear to be offered through specialty associations and clubs associated with outdoor sports, adventure and extreme sport activities.

3.1.6 Non-Governmental Organizations

Strengths

More NGOs are Using Eco-tourism as a Sustainable Development Tool - Numerous conservation and tourism NGOs exist in the country, forming an important network and lobby. There are three national, and seven regional tourism NGOs with a significant focus on the eco-tourism sub-sector. They are beginning to form a critical mass of national and grass-roots efforts to direct attention and action on the development of national eco-tourism identity. National and regional conservation NGOs are also turning to eco-tourism as a viable tool to realize conservation objectives in and around protected areas.

NGOs are Establishing Public-Private Links to Promote Eco-tourism - Both tourism and conservation NGOs are gaining valuable experience in creating models for institutionalizing interaction among local, private businesses, local government, and protected areas. Although the capacity of most organizations is limited, their very existence at the national, regional and local levels is important for the future of eco-tourism development. The Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT) represents the largest group of Bulgarian eco-tourism practitioners and associations attempting to specialize in eco-tourism. Its diverse and varied constituency is important to the national agenda on tourism development.

Weaknesses

Poor Communication Among NGOs - Coordination and communication among various NGOs is poor, reducing the effectiveness of each organization. There is poor understanding about complementary functions and responsibilities among NGOs, and subsequently a poor delineation of roles and little specialization in various aspects of eco-tourism development. At present, no one NGO has taken a leadership role in eco-tourism and there is no agreed upon mechanism for coordination among constituents. Although conservation NGOs use national coordination mechanisms, they still fail to coordinate regularly on eco-tourism and other themes.

Lack of Clear Objectives for NGO Work on Eco-tourism - In the absence of national policy, NGOs focusing on eco-tourism work on an ad-hoc basis. There is sometimes confusion in their ranks about whether they are practicing eco-tourism as a conservation tool, as a small business development tool, or as a rural/municipal development tool. This confusion results in mixed messages, and a mixed agenda in a field that is still young and evolving in the country.

Poor Institutional Organization within Regional Associations Promoting Tourism/Eco-tourism - Regional eco-tourism/tourism associations are just beginning to understand the purchasing, marketing and advertising potential of belonging to an association. At present,

associations remain dependent on strong or devoted personalities, often working without reimbursement. There is a limited institutional history and little institutional confidence. Many associations have yet to examine their political and organizational strengths, as many have evolved with only weak “product” development experiences and no real institutional development skills.

Communication and coordination between regional associations is lacking and there is no clear appreciation for where collective action and information sharing might take them. While these specialized tourism associations are gaining experience and institutional strength, they have yet to become destination management centers for their regions. Local and regional eco-tourism associations lack sufficient human resources, and they have minimal or no mechanisms for regular funding. They still lack the necessary professional training and exposure to eco-tourism practices, and this affects credibility at the local level.

Poor Skills within NGO Community to Develop Eco-tourism - Conservation NGOs practicing eco-tourism remain largely dependent on project funding to realize conservation objectives. While many of the conservation organizations have particularly good experience in public awareness, promotion and publicity, their abilities to steer eco-tourism product development and enterprise remain weak.

3.1.7 Financing Eco-tourism

Strengths

More Funds are Available for Eco-tourism Development and Marketing - A host of donor projects and programs provide funding for institutional development, product development, marketing and advertising, and business development in this sub-sector. Some donors provide capital for projects and services. The Bulgarian government is beginning to steer EU pre-accession funds towards this sub-sector. PHARE, SAPARD and ISPA funds are collectively starting to target sustainable tourism goals, with infrastructure as their prime target.

The government is also using other financial mechanisms to steer money towards eco-tourism financing. There is the new Enterprise Fund for Environmental Activities Management (formerly the National Environment Protection Fund), and the newly created Bulgaria Protected Areas Fund – an endowment from which a portion of monies will be used to support community eco-tourism around protected areas.

Most recently, the GOB, with PHARE funds, has released requests for proposals for development of Bulgaria’s cultural tourism, with a total fund of 6.6 million Euro. Another 5.5 million EURO will be made available for eco-tourism under the same program starting late 2003, early 2004.

Banks are Developing Loan Programs for Accommodation Facilities - Private sector banking has demonstrated increasing interest in one major aspect of this tourism sub-sector – accommodation. Loans for eco-tourism have primarily focused on small and medium size hotels – either as part of new construction or as part of privatization of state tourism facilities. More recently, there has been some consideration of loans for environmental management improvements for hotel energy, waste management, and similar systems.

Weaknesses

Donor Support for Sustainable Development is Decreasing - Apart from EU pre-accession funds, there is a significant decrease in donor support for this sub-sector. For almost, 8 years, various donors supports programs in sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, and agro-ecological tourism as part of their development assistance portfolios. Most of these programs and projects have come to a close. Most focused on the development of new markets, new products, and attempted to integrate eco-tourism within conservation or regional land-use plans. Unfortunately, there was little attention paid to institutionalizing eco-tourism planning, business development, and financing. These have largely been left to market forces. However, there is not a rural tourism/eco-tourism development program in the world that has succeeded solely based on market forces, and Bulgaria is no exception.

Lending Institutions Reluctant to Invest in Eco-tourism Development - In the absence of loan guarantees, subsidies, or incentives, eco-tourism financing will remain a challenge into the foreseeable future. Private lending institutions remain reluctant to address the small scale of most eco-tourism projects, and are not attracted by the rates of return. They are reticent to fund any aspect of eco-tourism development that does not have clear collateral attached to it, and so tend to continue to favor hotels and restaurants in their loan portfolios.

Venture capital has been the source of most eco-tourism financing, and appears to remain so in the short-term. Remittances from abroad, foreign earned salaries, and family money continue to be the most significant sources of legitimate eco-tourism financing in the country.

3.1.8 Markets

Strengths

Tourism is a Successful and Growing Sector of the Economy - Bulgaria has considerable achievements in mass tourism, hospitality, catering and services delivery in high volume destinations. Bulgaria also has extensive contacts with large volume tourism markets, market suppliers, and operators. These should prove important and helpful to the development of a new sub-sector, through associated marketing, product diversification and advertising.

Domestic Tourism Market is Growing - A growing Bulgarian middle class represents a significant domestic tourism market. The domestic market has significant potential for helping to meet the first stages of eco-tourism development and growth in the country. While this growth may not be high profile, it is the type of growth that can help build confidence and experience among local eco-tourism businesses. In addition, domestic market studies provide enough information to begin targeted advertising and marketing campaigns to eco-tourism destinations with minimal challenges to marketing, advertising, services, reservation, and monitoring systems. For the short-term, focusing on the development of a strong domestic market may realize more returns, more quickly than any other market segment.

Weaknesses

Tourism Service Quality in Rural Areas is Inadequate - The quality of tourism services in the market place in most rural areas is not always professional. While hospitable and well meaning, services can be disappointing or far too innocent to be useful. At the present time, there is no system for standardizing the quality of products and services in the area of eco-

tourism. And there are only a few attempts to offer training in this field. The role and purpose of certification systems are appealing but poorly understood in their execution. Certification processes and support networks are absent, and regular audits are not performed. Voluntary compliance is still far too localized, and does not extend into the general market place. There are but a few small attempts to standardize services and certify products; the “Bulgarski Dom” effort is an example.

The Domestic Tourist Market is Underdeveloped - The domestic market remains underdeveloped and under-exploited. Many of Bulgaria’s domestic tourist agencies are oriented almost entirely to mass tourism destinations and the international market, where volumes and turnover are higher. A few tour operators have focused their efforts on the domestic market, i.e. services for Bulgarians in Bulgaria, but at a practical level there is no operator offering eco-tourism services to Bulgarians. This market is developing in an ad-hoc fashion in regional destinations, and by word of mouth.

Bulgarian Eco-tourist Products Are Poorly Developed - Product and destination development suffers from a lack of experience, creativity, inadequate market preferences/profiling, and inadequate exposure to other (regional and international) eco-tourism ideas and experiences. Too many of the eco-tourism products that are evolving suffer from a repetition of ideas and styles that have been tried elsewhere in the country. New market development suffers from repetition because of poor coordination between destinations, illustrating the paucity of information exchanged between eco-tourism destinations. There are no formal channels for exchanging experiences in the sub-sector.

3.1.9 Publicity, Advertising and Marketing

Strengths

Tourism Marketing and Promotion Campaigns are Expanding - Bulgaria is increasingly active in developing publicity and advertising materials and annual strategies for its mass tourism markets. Participation in international trade fairs and specialty trade shows has been increasing since the successful privatization of major resorts. Public-private coalitions of tourism industry leaders demonstrate the cooperation between large-scale tourism providers and government. Collaboration is seen in marketing, advertising, and promotion of the country as a destination for inexpensive holidays. Strong European marketing and advertising means that Bulgaria can compete with its summer holiday neighbors – Turkey and Greece – in attracting summer holiday makers. Pricing structure and significant improvement in accommodation and services are making Bulgaria competitive in the major winter and summer holiday markets.

Efforts to appeal to the domestic market are increasing too. A combination of domestic advertising, favorable price structure, and easy reservation services show that Bulgarian operators want to meet a growing domestic demand for ski and beach destinations. Development of the domestic market should allow facilities to sustain higher occupation rates, maintain turnover, and stay open longer.

Tourist Packages are More Diversified - Both international and domestic marketing and advertising efforts are beginning to diversify their packages. More and more operators and destinations are advertising trips to cultural and natural sites, festivals and events in response to a growing demand from international clients for a diversity of activities, and more of an introduction to Bulgaria.

National Agency Appointed to Promote Bulgarian Tourism - Appointment of a new National Agency for Tourism Advertising and Promotion is the first in a series of “one-stop-shops” for tourism materials, tourism data, and information management. The Agency is responsible for the development of “Smart Info”, a tourism information and reservation system that is expected to provide on-line services to domestic and international markets. Efforts have been made to include eco-tourism and information concerning eco-tourism accommodation, services, natural resources and crafts, in the new system’s terms of reference.

Weaknesses

Marketing Campaigns Fail to Develop a Distinct National Identity for Bulgaria - In observing present marketing and advertising trends, there is little to separate Bulgaria from similar beach or ski destinations in the world, apart from price. There is very little that is distinctive about marketing or advertising Bulgarian destinations in the international market place, and few efforts to illustrate Bulgaria as a “unique” destination. While traditional Bulgarian images may be used in promotion and advertisement literature, there are very few attempts to link new market development to Bulgaria’s cultural and natural heritage. Apart from international tourist guidebooks, there is very little information (marketing, advertising, publicity) available to international tourists or visitors in Bulgaria about its history, nature, culture, and traditions. Bulgaria needs a national identity for tourism that distinguishes it from other countries. Eco-tourism and Bulgaria’s efforts in sustainable tourism might provide important parts of that image.

Lack of Coordination on Diversifying International Tourist Experience - More recent attempts to diversify products and destinations for international clients have been met with moderate success. Large-scale tour operators are beginning to diversify their product packages, and include day and overnight visits to natural sites and cultural destinations away from mass tourism centers. These attempts, however, remain poorly coordinated with destinations around the country, and seldom include regional eco-tourism providers in their development or advertising.

Marketing Efforts have Narrow Geographic Focus - International and domestic market surveys are important tools for tailoring advertising and marketing efforts. Since much of Bulgaria’s marketing is accomplished through large tourism operators, it suggests that there is not much need for international visitor surveys. Market efforts tend to focus on Bulgaria’s traditional clients, Eastern Europe, and Russia, and more recently, on Western Europe. Other markets remain largely unexplored.

Inadequate Resources to Market and Promote Domestic Tourism - Domestic eco-tourism marketing and advertising is almost non-existent. Both remain largely in the hands of individuals or of regional eco-tourism associations that have minimal capacity to develop and distribute their information. Printed materials are scarce, and few web sites exist. There is no central information, marketing, or advertising system, and nothing similar at regional levels. Some small Bulgarian operators, attending to a small resident, expatriate market, depend on e-mail, word-of-mouth and custom-made itineraries to preserve their niche in a very small domestic market. They have little or no advertising budgets, and are unable to afford the production costs of specialty information materials.

Poor Efforts at Understanding Tourist Satisfaction - One of the biggest deterrents to effective marketing and advertising remains the gap in understanding between “what the client is

offered”, and the “clients level of satisfaction”. Mechanisms that generate this information (exit surveys and satisfaction surveys) are not a regular part of marketing and advertisement strategies or efforts. Local and regional eco-tourism providers suffer from inadequate feedback on their facilities and services.

Lack of Information on Eco-tourist Needs and Expectations - Information about domestic and international markets/clientele is also lacking. For eco-tourism to succeed in Bulgaria, it must be able to gauge better the demands, needs, and expectations of its eco-tourism markets. Some Bulgarian eco-tourism operators are using “familiarization tours” to market their services and destinations to international eco-tourism operators. The results of this information are proprietary – they are not shared widely. Such efforts have barely been tried on the domestic level.

Poor Participation in Trade Shows and Niche Market Events - Representation at trade fair and industry shows remains limited. Eco-tourism is seldom featured, if at all, as part of national tourism advertising at these venues. Bulgarian attendance and participation at major “niche” market eco-tourism trade shows is also extremely weak. The Smart-Info system of data and data management has not yet been implemented.

3.2 Opportunities

Opportunities in this analysis are an examination of factors inside and outside the country that contribute to creating an environment that enables eco-tourism development in Bulgaria.

3.2.1 Macro-Economic and Political Environment

The Macro-economic and Political Environment is Favorable for Eco-tourism Development - The overall social-economic and political environment in the country is favorable for the development of eco-tourism as a specialized sub-sector and a tool for local development. There is political peace in the country, and a new consistency in government offering some assurance of continuity of policy and legislative development. There are no territorial controversies with neighboring countries. Bulgaria is regarded a stronghold of peace on the Balkans. Significant and successful debt restructuring, a major improvement in the country’s bond rating, and a strong currency board contribute to growing international recognition and confidence in the macro-economic future of the country. All of these constitute important conditions for the development of tourism and in the case of eco-tourism, an opportunity for marketing South-Eastern Europe as a regional destination.

Small and Medium Sized Business Support is Promoted as part of the National Economic Policy - The economic policy of the current Bulgarian government includes special provisions for the development of small and medium enterprises. The government has provided credit guarantees in several banks to support loans to small and medium businesses at preferential terms. A one-stop shop model has been developed for small local businesses in order to reduce the administrative process for starting a small business. The Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises has been strengthened, and it has an important advocacy role within the government for small and medium enterprises.

The NGO Sector’s Role in Societal Change is Growing - The development of the NGO sector in the country over the last ten years has increased their role in the country’s social, economic

and political life. They are becoming real partners with government. Bulgarian NGOs are becoming more professional and specializing in different areas. They are gaining international support and becoming part of the international NGO community.

Consistent Efforts towards Government Decentralization - In the last 7 years there have been consistent efforts to decentralize government roles and responsibilities to local government units. There is greater subscription to more localized accountability for overall social and economic development in the country. Despite the difficulties in the practical implementation of these approaches, the political will of the government is an important condition for the creation of an environment favorable for eco-tourism development.

3.2.2 Market Trends

Eco-tourism is Growing in International Importance - International trends in eco-tourism compare favorably with trends in general tourism growth. Annual tourism turnover grows at an average of 4-5% per year, and mountain tourism alone accounts for between 15-20% of the international tourism market. Eco-tourism on the other hand is growing at an annual average rate of 10-30% per year.

Tourism to Bulgaria is on the Rise - International tourist arrivals increased in 2002 by 8.6% over 2001 (2 992 590 international tourists according to the Ministry of Economy). The income generated from tourism increased by 11.1% compared to 2001, and amounted to 1.334 billion USD, excluding transportation. Expenditures by Bulgarian tourists abroad increased by 8.24%, compared to 2001. Bulgaria is demonstrating its ability to offer high quality services at recognized tourism destinations, at relatively lower prices, making them competitive in the European and other international markets.

International Interest in Eco-tourism and Cultural Tourism is Growing - Eco-tourism was given added legitimacy with the designation of the International Year of Eco-tourism and the Quebec Declaration in 2003. Cultural tourism is also increasing in importance in the international market. Campaigns for celebrating a “common heritage” for central and eastern Europe emphasize the diversity and significance of culture within a common European framework. These international trends lend support for Bulgaria’s development of eco-tourism and cultural tourism.

3.2.3 Bulgaria’s Position in the Region and in Europe

Bulgaria is a Safe and Unexplored Country - Bulgaria is regarded as the most politically stable country on the Balkans. There is nothing to deter the confidence and trust in Bulgaria as a safe travel destination. In addition, while Bulgaria is close to Western Europe, it is perceived as a place that remains unexplored.

Bulgaria is at the Crossroads between Asia and Europe - In the last few years, there has been increasing interest in the role Bulgaria plays as a bridge between Turkey, Greece, and Europe. This is seen in part by the growth of Bulgaria as a vacation and cultural destination, and also as a transit country. There are growing expectations that Bulgaria will serve as a hub for a variety of transport, communication, and industrial services because of its location at the crossroads of Asia and Europe.

Bulgaria can Develop as a Regional Center for Cultural Tourism - There is a growing interest in Bulgaria's role in cultural tourism in Southeast Europe, particularly on a trans-national, regional level. Cultural tourism, with Bulgaria as a center of the region's cultural heritage, contributes to a sense of regional social development and cooperation.

3.2.4 EU Pre-Accession Process and NATO Membership

These two national goals contribute to Bulgaria's international recognition, and continue to dictate trends in national policy and legislative reform. One is Bulgaria's membership in NATO, which was accomplished in 2002. The other is membership in the European Union, expected by 2007, and anticipated to bring tangible benefits, important subsidies, and much improved economic growth. Government efforts towards accession present an important opportunity for eco-tourism to contribute to the nation's conservation, economic growth, and sustainable development agenda.

3.3 Threats

Threats are factors external to eco-tourism that can detract from its development in the country. The eco-tourism sector cannot affect these factors, or attempt to circumvent them.

3.3.1 Economic Transition

Both Bulgaria and South-East Europe are in the process of transition to a market economy. This transition has been characterized by high investment risks; lengthy administrative procedures for private sector business; the collapse of the banking system; corruption, and unfamiliarity with the administration of market systems. While this transition brings greater political stability in Bulgaria, there is still international concern about the risks associated with investment, transparency and accountability; land ownership and land markets; currency stability, and rule of law.

3.3.2 Terrorism

The global threats to tourism arising from international terrorism create an uncertain future for international travel and the tourism industry as a whole. Additional security precautions and the costs of anti-terrorist measures are reflected in higher airport taxes and higher air travel costs.

3.3.3 Competing National Demands

There are significant competing demands for government support and financing in Bulgaria. These demands include the social welfare and education sectors, and rural infrastructure upgrade and development. Competing agendas at the national and local levels for scarce resources could detract from realizing eco-tourism goals.

4. Eco-tourism – a Sustainable Development Tool and Competitive Advantage for Bulgaria

Eco-tourism is a cornerstone of Bulgaria's national tourism development strategy. More importantly it is a tool for improving local livelihoods in Bulgaria's rural areas, and it is a sound mechanism for biodiversity conservation inside and outside of the protected areas system. Eco-tourism is the natural choice for Bulgaria in its desire to develop sustainable livelihoods and land use, and conserve its natural assets. Thus, the National Eco-tourism Strategy reflects the number and diversity of public and private initiatives throughout the country. The continued engagement and focus on these achievements and the role of local government and local people is crucial for eco-tourism development in Bulgaria.

4.1 A Vision for Eco-tourism in Bulgaria

Eco-tourism will be an essential element of Bulgaria's sustainable development agenda. As an important part of sustainable tourism, it is a tool for biodiversity conservation and rural development. Eco-tourism will become a pillar of national tourism development and a viable element of the national economy. It will be a real alternative for the improvement of livelihoods in rural communities. It will become a major contributor to Bulgaria's competitiveness in world markets. Eco-tourism will become an important part of local government planning, revenue generation, and civic pride. In combination with aspects cultural tourism, it will continue to be an important complement to Bulgaria's culture and its preservation.

This strategy recognizes that Bulgaria is at a crossroad in the development of its national tourism identity and position in the world market. Eco-tourism will become synonymous with international perceptions of Bulgaria, and will become part of Bulgaria's promotion and image development at home and abroad. Bulgaria will become known for:

- Decentralized, sustainable tourism networks supported by a recognized system of planning, development and investments;
- Operating and maintaining high standards of environmental management systems supported by the private and public sectors;
- Capturing a significant portion of the European travel market dedicated to the principles and practices of eco-tourism;
- Regional leadership in cross-border tours and travel based on eco-tourism, and related to the natural themes and culture of the Balkans and southeastern Europe;
- Being a country that successfully combines nature tourism and cultural tourism, and thus manifests these in forms of eco-tourism in keeping with national pride and heritage.

4.2 Bulgaria's Eco-tourism Mission and Expected Results

Bulgaria shall offer high quality tourism products throughout the year, taking advantage of the diversity, uniqueness, and authenticity of its natural and cultural resources. These products will be targeted to national and international visitors who are responsible, caring and supportive of nature protection, biodiversity conservation and Bulgaria's cultural heritage. Eco-tourism for Bulgaria, therefore, is a brand of tourism that:

- Contributes to local economic growth and social development;
- Becomes an important tool in local government planning and development;
- Serves as the basis for strong regional, sustainable tourism associations and networks;
- Attracts international tourists at higher expenditure levels, and for longer periods of time throughout the year;
- Contributes to the domestic tourism market throughout the year;
- Expands trips and tours involving regional cooperation and linkages;
- Develops positive attitudes and knowledge in Bulgarian communities towards biodiversity conservation and cultural preservation and interpretation;
- Perpetuates and develops environmental friendly livelihoods;
- Expands the number of tools and financial mechanisms for preserving natural and cultural resources;
- Drives infrastructure development in appropriate, environment-friendly ways.

Implementation of this National Eco Tourism Strategy in coordination with the Cultural Tourism Development Strategy (CTDS) is expected to lead, over the next 10 years, to the following results. These results can be organized into major themes. These themes, in turn, serve as the framework for the NETS.

A. Conservation and Preservation of Biological and Cultural Resources

- The viability of the national system of protected areas and cultural sites is strengthened;
- Implementation of the National Ecological Network and Bulgaria's leadership in applying EU standards of NATURA 2000 principles of landscape classification and conservation is adopted as a planning tool;
- Cultural and historical heritage, the identity and practices of Bulgarian people, and the diverse offerings found in the country's regions are preserved.

B. Regional and Local Development

- A process and procedures for decentralized eco-tourism planning and fiscal management with strong local accountability is attained;
- The commitment and support of the local people towards natural and cultural heritage conservation and eco-tourism development is improved;
- Regional networks of institutions and organizations that serve as the basis for eco-tourism marketing, product development, financial investments, and business development are established and operating;
- Eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, and environmental management systems are embraced as part of local government planning and operations;
- Eco-tourism and cultural tourism revenue-generating mechanisms are established and evaluated as fair and supportive of natural, cultural and historic resources, as well as of infrastructure and services attached to this sector;
- Eco-tourism contributes to a policy of rural development that both develops the capacity of rural communities, protected areas and cultural sites and makes them equitable partners in realizing this national strategy.

C. Eco-tourism Business Development

- Business development mechanisms are developed that support and nurture the needs of local, rural, and small eco-tourism businesses;
- A network of small business development services is established and is evaluated by their clients as supportive, efficient and timely;
- Bulgarian lending institutions complement the implementation of this eco-tourism strategy and develop loan programs and services that better support the small business environment in the country;
- Specialty and niche products, which combine natural, cultural and historic resources, are developed and successfully sold on national and international markets.

D. National Policy, Management and Administration of the Strategy

- A clear legislative base, regulatory practices, standards, and conditions for offering eco-tourism products for Bulgarian and international markets is introduced and functioning;
- Mechanisms for coordinating eco-tourism and cultural tourism are developed harmonizing NETS and CTDS, and their approval as an integral part of the National Tourism Strategy;
- The capacity and capabilities within institutions of higher education and vocational training are better prepared to serve the Bulgarian labor force engaged in eco-tourism;
- A system of incentives (matching grants and loan guarantees) are developed and offered in support of regional and local eco-tourism networks;
- Eco-tourism marketing and promotion strategies and campaigns result in an image of Bulgaria as a quality and attractive destination that offers to the European and world market a unique product based upon the unity of natural, cultural and historic heritage;
- A national steering mechanism is developed that serves the demands and needs of regional networks and local constituencies;
- The numbers of opportunities and tools to promote and advertise Bulgaria's comparable advantage in eco-tourism are increased for domestic and international markets;
- Benefits from the development of innovative and sustainable financial mechanisms that support protected areas, cultural sites, and sustainable tourism best practices are realized.

4.3 Achieving Bulgaria's Eco-tourism Mission

4.3.1 Inter-agency Cooperation

Since eco-tourism and sustainable tourism is not the single domain of any one national agency or organization, the agenda for eco-tourism can only be accomplished if coordinated among relevant stakeholders. Eco-tourism in Bulgaria requires the coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Economy with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Regional Development, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, and the Ministry of Environment and Waters. Small groups of private entrepreneurs, local government and NGOs have an important role in the dialogue, and national and local efforts of cooperation and coordination since the backbone of eco-tourism to date has originated with them. Special attention should be paid to inter-agency coordination to ensure joint action on eco-tourism.

The Ministry of Economy, the national agency responsible for tourism policy, strategic planning and marketing, must include eco-tourism as an essential element of its overall approach to the national sustainable tourism agenda. Eco-tourism must also become a major feature of the National Tourism Council. Eco-tourism should be the topic of a separate working group within the National Tourism Council for an initial five-year period, with its constituents determining its future after this time.

4.3.2 Competitive Cluster Approach for Strategic Planning

The Competitive Cluster Concept

Some economic sectors and sub-sectors are closely related. Tourism, for example, relates to agriculture, transport, education (tourism and foreign language education and training), environmental protection, and cultural heritage preservation. This system of related sectors is referred to as a "cluster". The competitive cluster concept presumes that changes in one of the related sectors can affect the rest in one way or another. Therefore, stimulating one sector will directly stimulate and create incentives for another. One region or the whole country can obtain a competitive advantage in not only one sector but in a whole system of related sectors, and a competitive cluster is formed.

In the present NETS, the concept of competitive cluster is proposed as an approach for developing a group of economic sectors related to eco-tourism regionally. Developing activities and services, organized in effective chains of eco-tourism supply, provides stimuli to transport, agriculture, food production, communal services and other sectors of local economy. They will also stimulate activities associated with cultural heritage such as preservation of cultural monuments; development of local industries and production; traditional crafts; training of personnel in this field, and the pedagogy of heritage. Thus, eco-tourism could become the engine of economic prosperity for the regions in Bulgaria.

The competitive cluster approach is a useful tool for achieving Bulgaria's eco-tourism vision. The core element of the cluster is the comparative advantage of Bulgaria's natural and cultural attractions and its biological diversity. The competitive cluster provides opportunities to small and medium enterprises to compete at national and international levels. It can provide them with better access to information and resources and allow for flexibility and rapid adoption of innovations.

The competitive cluster model for eco-tourism in Bulgaria is analyzed and developed as a set of strategic relationships that can be addressed by donors, the private sector and government in a specific program of support to eco-tourism. At the center of this model are Bulgaria's natural biodiversity and cultural diversity. These are reflected in a network of protected areas, cultural sites, and regional customs. The competitive cluster is the model that guides the NETS.

The competitive cluster can be used by existing groups of eco-tourism providers, and can serve as a foundation for developing new eco-tourism associations at the local or regional levels. The cluster is predicated on the development of partnerships and activities that include networking, training, exchange of information, and coalitions that seek to improve infrastructure, develop policy and regulations, and to work with local, regional and national governmental and legislative authorities. Technical assistance can be more effectively provided for marketing eco-tourism products and the linkages with reservation systems, advertising, and other national networks can be made.

4.4 A Policy Framework for Eco-tourism

Eco-tourism has been recognized as a national and rural development tool. The framework from the International Year of Eco-Tourism and the protocols adopted by its international constituents provide a valuable guide. There are four major elements in this framework.

- Eco-tourism Planning and National Policy
- Legislation and Regulation of Eco-tourism
- Product Development, Marketing, and Promotion
- Monitoring the Costs and Benefits of Eco-tourism

Eco-tourism Planning and National Policy

Eco-tourism must become more than a tool associated with protected area planning and management for this vision to be realized within Bulgaria. It must secure a recognized role within national government policy and planning at four key strategic levels – Environmental, Regional and Local Government, Agricultural, and Cultural. Eco-tourism demands integrated, multi-disciplinary planning and operations to succeed. Eco-tourism will require the coordination and collaboration of ministries at national level. It will also require a level of coordination and cooperation at the regional and local government. Strategic cooperation among partners for ensuring unified action between eco-tourism and cultural tourism, with a view to achieving a synergic tourist effect in areas rich in natural and cultural heritage, is essential.

Clear mechanisms for agency cooperation need to be developed, and this will require capacity building, orientation, and skills training. Eco-tourism can only be sustained if accompanied by the development of recognized national planning tools. Implementation of NETS will require the development of networks at local and regional levels, as well as mechanisms for coordinating these networks at the national level. Government policy on public- private partnerships at local and national levels must be examined, and elements that are mutually beneficial reinforced. For eco-tourism to succeed it must engage local government and define its role in revenue generation, investment, taxation and infrastructure planning and development. Eco-tourism's success in Bulgaria must be guided by a national policy of investment and financial support that is focused on a scale appropriate to local government and rural people. Special attention should be paid to civic sector participation in the overall management of eco-tourism and creating favorable conditions for its development.

Eco-tourism Legislation and Regulation

Eco-tourism must eventually be embraced in national legislation. If it is to succeed as part of national policy, laws and secondary instruments that guide its development and provide incentives for its application throughout the country must support it. Legislation and regulations must be reviewed and changed to support more integrated development of eco-tourism within the National Ecological Network and in regional and local development tools. Bulgarian legislation should foster co-operation among sectors of eco-tourism, cultural tourism and other types of tourism. The Monuments of Culture Act may be an appropriate vehicle for formalizing cooperative mechanisms. Ratification of European Landscape Convention will be a valuable tool for improving Bulgaria's eco-tourism policies. Eco-tourism must complement other rural tourism initiatives. It must be incorporated in the mandate of local government. All aspects of the competitive cluster approach must be examined to alleviate any impediments imposed by legislation and regulation that are presently disincentives to developing sound eco-tourism models and competitive clusters.

Product Development, Marketing, and Promotion

Marketing, advertising, and product development are the most important tools for successful eco-tourism in Bulgaria. These activities must be implemented jointly with all stakeholders, taking advantage of contemporary media outlets, such as the Internet, to advertise and promote Bulgarian natural and cultural heritage. A certification scheme for Bulgarian eco-tourism should be developed and implemented. Certification systems, standards and the extent of their application should be adapted from European and international models to fit the Bulgaria market.

The role of public-private partnerships will also be important. These partnerships need to be developed to complement the national eco-tourism strategy and policy. Bulgaria will need to seek partnerships outside of the country with both large-scale tourism markets and niche market operators. Partnerships will require coordination in regional tourism markets, and local and national budgets to market and promote Bulgaria's tourism products. Everything from promotional campaigns and slogans to the packaging and marketing of eco-tourism products will succeed only if public-private partnerships are formed.

Monitoring Eco-tourism Costs and Benefits

Monitoring the implementation of the NETS and the economic impact of eco-tourism is important for determining if the objectives are being met and how they impact on the natural, cultural and social environment:

- (1) Biodiversity conservation advantages from eco-tourism must be monitored and evaluated, both inside and outside the protected areas network and specific to the National Ecological Network;
- (2) Rural development and economic growth advantages to rural communities must be monitored and evaluated, focusing particularly on those communities within the National Ecological Network, as these form a strategic network of towns and municipalities whose actions support biodiversity conservation and sustainable development;
- (3) Performance and growth of local government in response to its role in developing eco-tourism, with a focus on local government capacity, financing, and the ability to integrate eco-tourism development in support of biodiversity conservation and rural economic development;
- (4) Impacts and advantages to local culture, traditions, practices and the preservation of cultural monuments, and the ability of eco-tourism to increase benefits to rural areas and preserve and stimulate Bulgaria's unique set of traditions and practices.

Relevant stakeholders should be engaged in developing monitoring indicators so the benefits of an applied monitoring and evaluation program have the best effect.

The planning process for eco-tourism monitoring becomes just as important as the results, since stakeholders are invested in the program and in how the results will be used.

5. Strategic Objectives and Priority Actions

The NETS shall embrace a dual approach and engage the public and private sectors from the outset. Eco-tourism should be regarded as a viable sub sector of the national economy, subject to market demand and market forces. It should be developed as any business sector. It must build the capacity of eco-tourism operators to plan and manage activities and facilities. It must maintain standards for the quality and operations of hotels and other tourism facilities. It must effectively develop and maintain bookings/reservation systems, marketing and promotion activities. It must subscribe to voluntary certification systems; and it must build equity and generate profits.

To succeed as part of a sustainable development agenda, eco-tourism must also be regarded as a strategic planning and development tool. For the public sector to understand its application and to nurture its values, eco-tourism must become a spatial planning tool for what can be done, where, and how. The benefits of it should be demonstrated to protected areas management authorities and to municipal and regional authorities – when they begin to use eco-tourism as part of their development strategies, eco-tourism will allow them eventually to gain new positions. And thus, Bulgaria benefits nationally and re-positions itself in the regional and world market segment.

Eco-tourism planning and development must have a common approach. The approach must provide an equal playing field for all who intend to engage in such enterprises, regardless of whether they are fortunate enough to be able to operate close to a protected area or cultural site, or they are part of other areas of high biodiversity and cultural value.

Strategic objectives for eco-tourism planning and development are grouped into the four major themes in the Mission Statement, with expected results extending over the next 10 years:

Conservation and Preservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage
Eco-tourism Business Development
Regional and Local Development
National Policy, Management and Administration of the Strategy

5.1 Biodiversity Conservation and Cultural Heritage Preservation

Biodiversity conservation is already recognized as a legitimate part of the National Plan for Economic Development. Bulgaria's biodiversity conservation strategy is implemented through a number of mechanisms, which form an important foundation for eco-tourism development. The draft Cultural Tourism Development Strategy identifies cultural heritage preservation as an important part of cultural tourism. The cooperation between eco-tourism and cultural tourism will stimulate the development of both and will contribute to an integrated approach to conserving and preserving biodiversity, complemented by the Bulgarian people and their history, traditions, practices, and cultural monuments.

5.1.1 *Develop Protected Area Management Plans (PAMP) Corresponding to Modern Nature Conservation Concepts and Cultural Heritage Conservation Plans (CHCP), to Create the Necessary Conditions for the Development of Eco-tourism and its Links with Cultural Tourism*

The terms of reference for both types of management plans should examine eco-tourism and cultural tourism development inside and outside protected areas, and include the following elements:

- An inventory and assessment of appropriate opportunities for development of eco-tourism inside and outside a protected area (PA) and Cultural Monuments (CM) and within at least a 20 km radius of each area
- Zones within PAs and CMs, in which eco-tourism areas are prioritized based on an assessment of potential human impacts
- Full participation of local communities, cultural heritage preservation groups, and local/regional government
- Financial assessment of the initial investment needed for maintaining sites
- Monitoring plans and periodic reviews of protected area, CMs, and eco-tourism development activities
- Announcement of new protected areas and Cultural Monuments, and development of appropriate management plans

5.1.2 *Provide Assurances that Protected Area Management Plans and Cultural Heritage Conservation Plans Mitigate Environmental Impacts Associated with Eco-tourism, and Operate within the Limits of Acceptable Use and Acceptable Change*

Protected areas and natural and cultural landmarks must be protected from negative human impact associated with different forms of tourism, including eco-tourism. When measuring impacts and establishing limits of acceptable use and change, protected area and cultural site managers must err on the side of conservation. The failure to do so can result in expensive restoration programs and/or the loss of heritage and biodiversity. Therefore protected area and site managers will work with others to:

- Develop a national system for the enjoyment and utilization of resources and sites that respects and sets limits on use and change
- Develop mechanisms that effectively enforce the management system
- Identify threats to biodiversity and cultural and historical heritage sites and apply measures for mitigating those threats
- Identify indicators and monitor changes in biodiversity, and cultural and historical heritage
- Apply official systems, standards and rules for the conservation of natural resources (species, localities, habitats, landscapes) and cultural and historical heritage sites in the regions of high conservation value, both inside and outside the protected area network
- Develop and utilize special training programs for training on assessment of acceptable change, and improving the skills and responsibilities of PA administrations, heritage site managers, representatives of the private sector in the area of eco-tourism, associations and local government

It will be difficult to define limits of acceptable use and acceptable change. Natural areas have extremely different levels of tolerance and resilience. This has been seen time and again throughout Bulgarian history. Cultural sites have less tolerance. Each site or eco-tourism area will need to have its own standards that must be monitored. However, national standards or

guidelines should be developed to direct these more local efforts. These should form a part of protected natural areas and cultural site management policy.

The role of Protected Areas Management Plans and Cultural Heritage Conservation Plans in coordinating activities of institutions should be outlined. It is essential that the limits of acceptable intervention on cultural and historic heritage be defined in the Cultural Heritage Conservation Plans, to avoid negative impacts of tourism on the sites. Eco-tourism uses natural and cultural/historical areas and should comply with all requirements for preserving the authenticity of cultural and historical values. It is important for local authorities and protected area management to closely coordinate with relevant central state institutions including the Ministry of Culture and the National Institute of Monuments of Culture, as well as with local specialized bodies within the system for preservation of cultural heritage.

5.1.3 Ensure that Revenue Generation for Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation is Clearly Provided for in Central Planning Mechanisms, and Includes Voluntary Visitor Contributions, Contracts, Taxes and Concessions

There are a number of practical mechanisms developing in Bulgaria to support protected area conservation and eco-tourism development. Many have the potential to financially benefit protected areas, cultural sites, and eco-tourism entrepreneurs. Provisions to develop these mutually beneficial arrangements are still in their infancy and need to be further analyzed and improved. There is a need to:

- Continue to review national legislation and reform it to allow fees to be collected from ecological and cultural tourism activities to fund the conservation, maintenance of resources and sites of natural and cultural heritage.
- Develop and legalize beneficial financial mechanisms that promote the primary objectives of sustainable development and nature conservation. Consider protected area and eco-tourism financial mechanisms models from other countries that employ the use of limited period concessions or commercial contracts
- Develop model contracts that serve to guide concession relationships, and establish their duration and operating procedures
- Assign the revenues generated from these contracts to benefit the objectives of nature conservation, cultural preservation, and local economic growth
- Support the establishment of a Protected Areas Fund (PAF) to ensure ongoing financial support for capital improvements and operating projects associated with a system of protected areas in the country. The PAF would support capital investments, park development projects, infrastructure, cultural sites, and provide eco-tourism development grants to communities that work in close proximity to protected areas.
- Assign central and municipal cultural funds, envisaged in the Law on Protection and Development of Culture, to support initiatives aimed at conserving and using cultural heritage for eco-tourism and cultural tourism.

5.1.4 Develop Inventories of Sustainable Agriculture, Cultural, and Historical Resources in Concert with National Ecological Network Sites

These inventories are a prerequisite for developing a competitive national eco-tourism product. To link these three evolving networks the following is appropriate:

- Use the National Ecological Network (NEN) as a guide for identifying and assessing sustainable agricultural resources for a national eco-tourism network and implement the priorities set in national and international legislation

- Develop and build a national network of cultural itineraries and include a database of all major sites of cultural and historical heritage, and cultural events as envisaged in the Strategy for Development of Cultural Tourism. Integrate these with the National Eco-tourism Network and the European Network of Cultural Itineraries
- Develop eco-tourism networks in compliance with existing national and international legislation
- Identify the human capacity and human resource networks that exist to support the NEN
- Develop and maintain a database to serve as the basis for a Geographic Information System, linking these elements at national and regional levels.

5.1.5 Support Sustainable Agriculture and Forestry, and Species Restoration Activities that can also Serve as Eco-tourism Opportunities

A number of agricultural and forestry practices in eco-tourism regions need to be developed in a sustainable way. Sustainable practices should be promoted as an incentive for collaboration between the private sector, eco-tourism business and agricultural and forestry businesses on conservation of species and habitats and cultural conservation. Measures needed include:

- Providing incentives and investment opportunities for those businesses and local communities that develop new conservation areas within priority biodiversity areas outside of the protected areas system
- Providing incentives and investment opportunities for rural communities and businesses that retain and adopt sustainable agriculture practices, organic production systems, and the restoration of native species and cultivars
- Providing incentives and investments for appropriate environmental management systems
- Providing subsidies and support for businesses and communities that take responsibility for cultural conservation
- Assisting the promotion of best production practices and effective operational models in Bulgaria between local and regional entities

5.1.6 Develop and Implement Volunteer Programs that Support Biodiversity Conservation, Cultural Preservation, Sustainable Land Use Systems, and Eco-tourism Development

Historically, voluntary efforts have been the basis of nature and culture tourism in Bulgaria. Excellent examples include the establishment of the Bulgarian Tourism Union and the Chitalishte. Unfortunately many voluntary efforts that link communities and volunteers to conservation, sustainable agriculture, cultural heritage and eco-tourism programs have been lost, or are deteriorating. Some attempts to revive these activities have been made by national and local NGOs and supported by donors. These are largely isolated and independent of central government support and recognition. In addition, there have been few efforts to link these voluntary organizations and their efforts to the private sector, particularly to eco-tourism activities. It is necessary to:

- Establish a national volunteer eco-tourism network around the themes of biodiversity conservation, culture, and sustainable agriculture. This would promote the regular exchange of information and experience, and direct and guide volunteer activities in the country
- Coordinate the activities of the national volunteer eco-tourism network with networks of volunteer organizations for cultural heritage conservation, in the spirit of the

Declaration of the Council of Europe (2001) on the role of volunteer organizations in the area of cultural heritage.

- Promote good practices in Bulgaria, citing how voluntary efforts have benefited the public
- Develop schemes for theoretical and practical training of volunteers as guides, and interpreters
- Offer practical field training in eco-tourism for students in education institutions as an alternative or supplementary training to existing field-training programs (in hotels, restaurants, and travel agents service). The activity should be linked with various forms of pedagogy of heritage promoted by the Council of Europe, particularly with European classes in exploring natural and cultural heritage.

5.2 Eco-tourism Business Development

In addition to being a tool for protected areas management, biodiversity conservation and cultural sites management, eco-tourism is also an important income generation tool. Sustained income generation requires business acumen and skills development. The dimensions of successful business development should be evaluated and applied to eco-tourism development.

5.2.1 *Develop Clusters or Networks of Core Eco-tourism and Supply Chain Businesses at the International, National, Regional and Local Levels*

Scattered eco-tourism initiatives in the country could benefit from the exchange of information and cost savings associated with a national network of eco-tourism providers. The scale of such a network is hard to determine at the present time and should evolve from a model that demonstrates the advantages to network subscribers. Eco-tourism clusters or networks could start within key regions of the country, growing into a national system. In order to advance this idea, it is important to:

- Establish relationships between national specialized tourism associations, leading travel agencies, and regional and local eco-tourism providers
- Integrate and unify available databases in the regions, compiled at different time periods with different standard and criteria, and include them in an integrated national informational network.
- Develop a clear network charter that is supported by periodic meetings, annual exhibits and forums
- Develop information networks that can demonstrate advantages to their subscribers and result in better business development
- Identify clusters by products or regions and attract them into a cluster to facilitate contacts and relationships, and to establish joint programs for developing a marketing strategy and a means of funding the product and/or region
- Involve conventional tourism businesses in eco-tourism initiatives
- Develop outreach programs to international and regional special interest groups—caving, hiking, rock climbing, botany, birding, and craft specialties, among others
- Develop a series of eco-tourism and cultural tourism products and networks centered on a combination of biodiversity conservation, cultural and historic heritage preservation, sustainable agriculture, and cultural heritage found in the National Ecological Network and the National Cultural Routes Network.

5.2.2 Improve the Entrepreneur Capacity of Businesses and Train Local Communities Providing Eco-tourism Services

Most local communities with good potential for offering and benefiting from eco-tourism do not have sufficient skills and experience to provide eco-tourism products and services to their clients. At a certain stage, small, rural communities are able to realize the advantages of eco-tourism as an income generation tool and as a municipal development tool, but they lack the necessary means and skills to realize success. Hence, these communities require small and micro business development assistance to develop entrepreneurial capacities. Such an approach requires:

- Business orientation seminars – e.g. an introduction to the supply and demand of eco-tourism
- Programs for raising public awareness on eco-tourism issues such as the Eco-Host program developed in British Columbia, Canada
- An awards program for the best national and regional practices and best investment by entrepreneurs in the field of eco-tourism.
- Business training in developing products, marketing, small business operation, business planning, and credit applications, provided within the national educational system, i.e. vocational schools, colleges and universities
- Nature and cultural heritage interpretation programs and training programs for guides
- An exchange of visits at the national, regional and international level for sharing experience and studying successful practices in the field
- Developing specialized eco-tourism vocational training programs on current tourism specialties for secondary and high schools
- Developing specialized training courses for entrepreneurs in eco-tourism that would become part of training programs provided by academic institutions, business centers and development agencies

5.2.3 Expand Access to Financing Mechanisms, Equity Investments and Other Funding Resources

Conditions for investing in, and financing eco-tourism in Bulgaria are relatively undeveloped and unfavorable. The scale and costs related to most rural eco-tourism products and services are not of a sufficient size to attract much commercial banking support. The scale and location of many of these business development efforts are varied, and represent no logistic and administrative advantage to a commercial bank if they were interested. However, investments in a great number of small-size projects in key target areas, rather than in large-scale individual projects, are needed to develop rural eco-tourism. Eco-tourism financing faces many challenges, and government agency support combined with (a) business planning and best management practices, and (b) financial facilitation and guarantee schemes, may provide solutions. The following mechanisms are seen as appropriate for advancing eco-tourism models that benefit the goals of nature conservation, cultural preservation, small business development, and improvement in rural communities' economic growth:

- Capitalize on the National Trust Eco Fund and Protected Areas Fund, to channel donor and government support to this evolving sector. Use state and donor contributions, private and foreign donors, to “grow” this investment fund for eco-tourism financing. Direct grants as well as matching grants can be provided to key eco-tourism investment areas and/or projects. The Bulgarian government must play decisive role in nurturing this funding mechanism by committing financial resources and attracting other donors.
- Allow the municipally- generated funds from the tourism tax to be used as matching funds for eco-tourism development. Municipalities who successfully generate funds

from this tax should be rewarded with matching grants from donor and government sources. Matching and/or challenge grants can also be tools for attracting private capital, and should operate at a scale that can be absorbed at local community levels

- Commercial banks should be encouraged to administer and service eco-tourism loans at a scale that can be managed by most rural eco-tourism development businesses. Their risk should be lowered with credit guarantees from the government and donor credit authorities. These services can be linked to a tailor-made business consulting and services network developed to serve eco-tourism development
- Leverage large-scale private sector investments. There is a growing trend to diversify private sector tourism offerings in the country in response to client demand. Hence, large-scale tourism operators are looking to diversify their products for clients, and eco-tourism is increasingly a focus of their interest. In areas rich in natural, cultural and historic heritage, the clients' interests are additionally stimulated. Diversification of Bulgaria's mass-tourism product could readily include eco-tourism. Correspondingly, a large-scale, private sector, eco-tourism investment program should be directed and brokered through local and regional eco-tourism associations. Large-scale investment programs in the private sector should include various forms of management through local or regional eco-tourism associations.
- Investigate and develop voluntary private contributions for eco-tourism development and nature conservation, cultural tourism development, and cultural and historic heritage preservation, through willing international and national private sector parties. Many private businesses and large hotels are increasingly employing a policy of adding a token voluntary contribution for nature conservation and/or eco-tourism to customer's bills. In other instances, corporate policies are evolving where a small contribution is made from each sale or service to an eco-tourism development or nature conservation fund. These are most common in international hotel chains and linked to overnights and/or laundry services. These "green" or conservation funds are increasingly becoming part of an international corporate policy and image, as well as a growing source of revenue to community and conservation activities
- Apply an analog to the "polluter pays" principle for big investments in mass-tourism. In cases of big tourism investments that compromise biodiversity or add an additional burden to the environment, a system obliging the investor to provide an environmental or biodiversity fee that benefits nature conservation and/or eco-tourism development should be considered
- Establish a national credit guarantee fund for eco-tourism SMEs.

5.2.4 Facilitate the Development of Effective Small and Medium Eco-tourism Enterprises

Small and medium enterprises play a key role in sustainable development. SMEs help meeting sustainable development objectives by generating and keeping income and economic benefits closer to home. They are more flexible and readily tailored to provide tourists with extra care or customized services. Their operations are often more in tune with community needs, and their offerings more sensitive to local traditions and know-how. Eco-tourism can thrive though a more considered small enterprise approach than the one that presently characterizes Bulgarian small tourism enterprises.

- Introduce integrated consultative and business development "agencies" linked to key eco-tourism regions, with assistance from Bulgaria's Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises and the UNDP Business Incubators and Business Centers Programs. These agencies should be a one-stop shop or "one-counter service" for eco-tourism development

- Use the consultative services provided by various EU programs and projects and other donors
- Develop projects in cooperation with SMEs Agency to take advantage of funds allocated for improving small enterprise effectiveness
- Develop a package of overall incentives and opportunities designed to support the character, scope and scale of eco-tourism enterprises, including financial and other incentives for small and medium enterprises, such as grace periods for repayment, tax allowances, and subsidized credits

5.2.5 Focus Eco-tourism Development on Domestic Markets as an Initial Priority and then Expand to Targeted International Market Segments

In the short-term, efforts to market and develop eco-tourism products and services should be targeted at the Bulgarian market. Surveys indicate that this market could be substantial, and can be an effective stepping stone to reach international markets. Additional market research should target group-oriented travel and eco-tourism related questions should be included in the Ministry of Economy tourism exit surveys. Eco-tourism service providers should be trained and provided assistance to assess and monitor customer satisfaction, to further develop and improve their products.

The Bulgarian eco-tourism market is relatively diverse. With a growing national income level, associated mostly with the urban areas, there is an expanding market for urban dwellers to enjoy eco-tourism products year-round for short periods. There is also a demand for longer, tailored programs during the summer months. More effort is needed to understand the needs and demands of this market segment and how these can be incorporated in the eco-tourism products. Focusing on the younger generation in Bulgaria appears to be a timely and workable starting point, since children and youth markets appear to be the most readily adaptable to eco-tourism products. This market segment is fairly responsive to eco-tourism themes and products. This market is less demanding and quick to grasp new ideas. Partnerships between eco-tourism service providers and local sports clubs could provide tailored programs directed at this market segment.

Regional trip circuits within Bulgaria should be developed. As Bulgaria's eco-tourism experience grows, transnational eco-itineraries should be developed to link Bulgaria with neighboring countries. National associations (BATA, BAAT, BARET, and BTU), local and regional eco-tourism associations, and other interested parties should work with the Ministry of Economy (MOE) to develop a national eco-tourism marketing strategy. Integrating eco-tourism niche markets into the MOE international marketing strategy, using international communications and the Internet, and actively participating in major travel market expositions should expand this cooperative effort. Recognized leaders in the international tourism field might then support familiarity trips to Bulgaria.

5.2.6 Formulate National Guidelines for a Visitors' Eco-tourism and Cultural Tourism Interpretation and Education Program

There are no national guidelines for tourist interpretation and education in Bulgaria's protected area system and surrounding areas that promote the messages of biodiversity conservation, eco-tourism, and cultural heritage. At present, each effort is often unique and individual and does not always accomplish its original intent. Many areas fail to offer tourists anything at all, and still other interpretation and informational efforts fail to identify their

target groups. In many instances, materials and programs can be too general to be of help, or too technical to be appreciated widely. In order to strengthen this field of interpretation and education, it is necessary to:

- Develop successful prototypes/examples of infrastructure, printed materials, signs, site interpretative materials, pre and post visit programs, and similar activities that can be used to guide interpretation and education efforts linked to biodiversity conservation, cultural conservation, and adjacent buffer zones
- Develop the expertise and appropriate support within national and local departments, protected area staff, and NGOs to promote these models
- Develop programs, curricula and specific training courses to address this need
- Integrate the development of infrastructure for eco-tourism and cultural tourism with area-specific interpretation and education programs
- Develop a certified eco-tourism guide program that expands the traditional functions of mountain and tour guides, and develops a cadre of skilled interpretation professionals operating at local and national levels.

5.2.7 Establish a Program for Eco-tourism Awareness and Capacity Building for Tourism Businesses and Government Officials

Nature protection, protected areas, cultural site managers, and local government are faced with presenting eco-tourism opportunities to representatives of small- and large-scale businesses. In order to afford communities and entrepreneurs a focused orientation to these opportunities, specialized programs need to be developed and taken on the road. Orientation efforts should concentrate on:

- Using existing models and practitioners, including exchange visits and best practices shared between successful communities and emerging eco-tourism communities
- Coordinating the development of these programs using national and regional level interdisciplinary working groups
- Subsidizing the organization and offering of these orientation programs through a special fund related to regional planning and development
- Using these programs to assess and promote the preparedness of regional entrepreneurs and local government to respond to eco-tourism as business and rural development opportunities
- Including these projects in The Sixth Frame Program of the EU for Technological Development, Research and Demonstration, to increase public knowledge on eco-tourism and bring Bulgarian companies closer to EU requirements, and to support the research needed for developing eco-tourism products.

5.2.8 Develop a Private Voluntary System for Eco-tourism Product Certification

There are two main reasons for eco-tourism destinations and businesses to get involved in certification and environment management programs. First, marketing the green certification has been successful in attracting customers and increasing profits. People are choosing locations and accommodations and other business relationships based on the green certification. Second, an environment management system (EMS) is an essential part of tourist management in key biodiversity areas. Biodiversity conservation, the communities, and the nation benefit from energy savings, effective waste management systems, and more environmental/landscape friendly infrastructure design. The development of a certification system can help to:

- Develop stronger relations with other European and international certification programs
- Promote best practices through exchange visits and exchange of information

- Generate interest in participating in regional and international forums to promote EMS standards
- Develop a voluntary certification and accreditation scheme in concert with regional development and promotion of private sector eco-tourism
- Identify tangible incentives and benefits stemming from voluntary certification
- Nurture and support national agencies and associations in their role as advisors and monitors of applied certification standards
- Utilize external third party bodies to review and validate certification actions
- Compare achievements with other member countries in the European Charter for Small Enterprises
- Establish a working group to develop a concept paper on certification of eco-tourist products, focusing initially on existing, registered trademarks and emblems of the three National Parks in Bulgaria.

5.3 National Policy and Management

5.3.1 Encourage Policy Coordination and Cooperation between Key Government Institutions to Formulate and Implement the NETS

Establishing eco-tourism as a major component of tourism development and rural development in Bulgaria, and integrating it with cultural tourism, requires effective coordination among key state institutions and their regional directorates. These are the Ministry of Environment and Waters, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Regional Development, and the Ministry of Education, or their successors. Preliminary coordination has been established through a Protocol Agreement among three of these ministries, but this coordination needs to be expanded over time. Several mechanisms are important to regular and consistent coordination of eco-tourism in the country:

- Develop a national coordination mechanism that focuses on eco-tourism development and will contribute to the finalizing and implementing the NETS
- Place the National Eco-tourism Working Group within the National Tourism Council to ensure that eco-tourism is appropriately addressed as a national economic development tool
- Specify the mechanism for coordinating the completion and implementation of NETS at the regional level
- Identify and incorporate key regional and private sector participants to assist in the completion and implementation of NETS
- Identify and incorporate national and regional non-governmental organizations in the Working Group
- Develop terms of reference and operating procedures for the Working Group
- Identify a financing mechanism for the national eco-tourism coordination mechanism and develop a timeline
- Define the role eco-tourism will play in the national development plan and in regional development plans.

It is important to immediately institutionalize the Working Group as a permanent unit of government to address the following objectives:

- Coordinate the review, revision and adoption of the NETS at the national, regional and local levels

- Supervise the formulation of an action plan to implement the NETS over a ten-year period
- Coordinate the implementation of the action plan with those responsible for mobilizing the necessary institutions, funding and resources

5.3.2 Develop Bulgaria's Image as One of Leadership and as a Model for Eco-tourism in the Balkans and in Europe

Effective marketing and promotion are critical for establishing Bulgaria's eco-tourism products on the international map (as well as within Bulgaria). Without a long-term national marketing strategy it will be difficult to maintain this sector and produce sustainable benefits to nature conservation and the local population. Steps to be taken include:

- Creating a uniform national eco-tourism identity with specific Bulgarian dimensions and use this image to make consistent eco-tourism information presentations. This effort would help to create a national image and give Bulgaria a European and international eco-tourism identity.
- Improving country maps and developing new guide books, and multimedia information systems focused on the variety and diversity of Bulgaria's eco-tourism attractions
- Highlighting eco-tourism sites, products and their links to Bulgaria's national biodiversity and cultural heritage on MOE, MOEW, and MOC websites and communication networks. Links to other relevant websites in Bulgaria and abroad should be included.

With its relative advantage in the Balkans as a stable republic with a growing communication role in the region, Bulgaria has the opportunity to become a regional leader in the field of eco-tourism. The advantages in the Balkans and in Europe are its:

- geographical position at the cross-roads of two continents
- distinct bio-ecological zones
- unique cultural heritage that is a significant part of the Pan-European Heritage
- position as an accession member to the EU with the largest intact ecosystems in Europe

To develop and support this image the following elements should be considered:

- Large-scale support by the government and private sector for advertising Bulgaria's natural and cultural heritage
- Support of promotional visits and twinning arrangements with other eco-tourism efforts in the region
- Private sector links with other European market segments that could be nurtured and supported
- Subsidies and support for Bulgarian participation and promotion in European eco-tourism networks and the European cultural trails network

5.3.3 Review and Revise National Legislation and Regulations to Promote Eco-tourism Development

A comprehensive review of national legislation needs to be done to identify those regulations that run counter to developing and promoting eco-tourism. This review is best achieved by a sub-group of the National Eco-tourism Working Group. The review should consider the experiences of other countries as they implemented decentralized governance policies, especially those that support eco-tourism development. The need to ratify the European Convention of Landscape should be emphasized.

5.3.4 *Analyze the Influence of the EU Accession Process on Eco-tourism Planning, Development and Funding Policies*

European Union regulations are highly committed to environmental and rural development issues. The Bulgarian process of eco-tourism development needs to be reviewed critically as it attempts to establish common ground with European regulations. A legal analysis of eco-tourism development in Bulgaria should include an assessment of EU regulations and programs promoting eco-tourism. The assessment and its results should be coordinated with the responsibilities and schedule of Bulgaria's Chief Negotiator to the EU and the Ministry of EU Accession.

5.3.5 *Adopt a System to Monitor the Implementation of the NETS, Including the Successes and Failures of Eco-tourism*

An impact monitoring system needs to be developed to measure the success of NETS and its impacts at local and regional levels.

With a view of achieving greater efficiency of the NETS in Bulgaria, the following key questions should be considered in development of the monitoring system:

- To what degree does eco-tourism contribute to the protection and management value of natural areas, cultural sites, cultural communities, and of a specific natural area?
- What are the biophysical impacts of eco-tourism in natural areas and on sites of cultural importance and significance?
- Are there any initiatives for managing eco-tourism impacts in the buffer zones and those zones affected by eco-tourism development?
- What is the capacity of local authorities to implement these initiatives?
- What is the impact of tourism on biodiversity and on cultural and historic heritage?
- What is the impact of eco-tourism on the government's development of policies to support to sustainable development of tourism?
- Is eco-tourism contributing to a better understanding of the environment and an improved social situation in the tourism destination/area?
- Is eco-tourism contributing to expanding local business and opportunities for income?
- Do eco-tourism activities and job opportunities reach new segments of local communities?
- Are collective benefits to the local community increasing?
- What are the social and cultural impacts of eco-tourism activities?
- Has eco-tourism development improved local access to information, increased technical knowledge and stimulated greater involvement of local community?
- To what degree do cultural and historical heritage contribute to development of eco-tourism in integral areas rich in natural and cultural values?
- What is the relationship of eco-tourism to cultural tourism and what is the effect of their joint action?

5.3.6 *Plan and Build Appropriate Infrastructure to Improve Access to Eco-tourism Opportunities*

If Bulgaria is to successfully promote its eco-tourism products to domestic and international markets, it must improve its communication and access infrastructure. Such efforts should include:

- Environmental impact assessment requirements, inspections and enforcement for eco-tourism related infrastructure and developments

- National standards for directional road signs to natural and cultural attractions and their location. This is a national need and a requirement for EU accession
- Building and maintaining third and fourth-class roads within the National Road Network leading to priority eco-tourism sites.
- Small infrastructure development in conjunction with parks, cultural sites, and local eco-tourism development. These include trail development, new tourism infrastructure, signage, interpretation programs and materials, shelters, benches, observation points, fireplaces, camping places and barriers.
- Adoption of safety standards and compliance measures
- Provision of modern phone and Internet services to key areas and remote communities

5.3.7 Apply Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to Eco-tourism Development, Planning, and Marketing Activities

GIS is a valuable tool in guiding informed decision making for biodiversity conservation. Its use will be an important tool for the National Ecological Network (NEN). Opportunities exist to use GIS for linking eco-tourism with the development of the NEN. This would then become an important tool for eco-tourism planning and marketing. GIS will be a valuable in developing the national cultural itineraries network and the database of cultural and historical sites of conservation value. GIS applications in eco-tourism are also the basis for regional and national reservations networks.

GIS is also an appropriate tool for linking regional planning with eco-tourism development. Eco-tourism, like any other land-based activity, needs to be spatially planned and coordinated. Currently an overview of the present situation is needed to review potential impacts and to set up monitoring systems. Spatial planning will become increasingly important as Bulgaria seeks to develop its rural areas.

5.3.8 Develop Cross-Border and Trans-boundary Cooperation on Eco-tourism and Nature Conservation

The dimensions and advantages of cross-border and trans-boundary cultural heritage and nature conservation, and cooperation in the field of eco-tourism and cultural tourism, are now being explored internationally. These networks can be used to coordinate national and regional eco-tourism policy in areas rich in natural and cultural heritage.

Valuable experience has been gained about national and regional cultural itineraries and their links to relevant European networks through the National Network of Cultural Itineraries and Cultural Itineraries of Southeast Europe. A few examples include the the Silk Route, the Wine Route, and Balkan Architecture Centers.

These networks are promoted via guidebooks, maps, and online route planning facilities. In addition, common signage and logos develop a common market presence across the full breath of the network.

Observations and recommendations made by participants at Bulgaria's National Forum on Eco-tourism, Mountains and Protected Areas indicate that regional and trans-border linkages could be facilitated by:

- Using World Heritage Sites as anchor attractions linked to other protected areas and local communities

- Linking popular sites to those less visited sites.
- Forming links to outlying sites that are not necessarily protected area sites.
- Coordinating with tour operators and site managers at protected area sites to create trip circuits and tour itineraries
- Improving the interpretative materials for tourists by linking several sites with stories describing their natural and cultural heritage, enhancing the visitor experience and quality of the tour
- Standardizing logos, sign symbols and other information aids in the region
- Creating networks of tourism and information centers
- Developing routes based on physical/geographical/cultural authenticity (e.g. Crusaders Route), and presenting them virtually, unifying elements in different countries by themes
- Fostering trans-border cooperation by developing the Balkan Green Belt, an integrated system of large trans-boundary protected areas in the Balkan countries. Examples include:
 - Strandja Nature Park with Turkey
 - Danube river and wetlands with Romania
 - future Western Stara Planina Nature Park with Yugoslavia
 - Nature Parks Ossogovo and Belassitsa with Macedonia
 - the trilateral Belassitsa Mountain Area with Greece, and Macedonia

5.4 Regional and Local Development

5.4.1 *Adopt a Strategic Regional Network Approach to Eco-tourism Development*

Bulgaria is host to a number of natural ecological and cultural assets. The country's mountains and waters are among its largest natural assets, and are where some of the largest mass tourism efforts are concentrated. Both of these geographical resources present enormous opportunities for eco-tourism efforts that will benefit rural communities to a much greater degree than mass tourism. A strategic regional approach to eco-tourism development is an important means to address the challenges of sustainable development. This approach:

- Nurtures decentralization
- Supports local government models
- Links taxation with local accrual of benefits,
- Fosters regional business associations
- Attracts business investment

Regional networks could become the basis for eco-tourism promotion and marketing, using information hubs linked to visitor centers at major tourism destinations and at protected areas gateways. Examples of existing regional networks for tourism development in Bulgaria include the Regional Tourism Councils, local eco-tourism associations, and information centers. A proposal for identifying geographic priorities, or eco-regions, is included in Section 6 of this Strategy.

5.4.2 *Stimulate and Nurture Existing Local and Regional Eco-tourism Models and Best Practices*

Tour operator and travel agency networks should remain one of the main cornerstones for regional eco-tourism development. Regional and local eco-tourism and tourism associations and committees could nurture these networks, and realize tremendous savings in time and investment. The model projects developed at MOEW and MOAF protected area sites could be used to orient and train other protected area/gateway communities on how best to determine their readiness to receive tourists and to take steps to improve their capacity. The following support should be provided to local and regional tourism or eco-tourism associations:

- Develop appropriate orientation and training programs on eco-tourism themes that can be used as models for promoting eco-tourism development
- Establish centers or focal points of business expertise and support, including training-the-trainer programs focused on business planning, risk analysis, financial analysis, and entrepreneurship
- Expand destination management capacity, including land use planning and zoning, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and cooperative marketing
- Develop regional eco-tourism marketing programs
- Create Internet and visitor center reservation and booking systems
- Develop a regional database of eco-tourism goods and services
- Participate in other regional, national, and international market places and fairs to promote products and exchange ideas
- Expand relationships with regional government, local government, and protected area managers

5.4.3 *Support Local Participation in the Planning Process to Identify Community-based Opportunities Associated with Protected Areas, Biodiversity Conservation, and Cultural Attractions*

The success of eco-tourism and its ability to serve the income generation needs of rural communities will depend on a decentralized implementation of the NETS. It will also depend on much more focused, local engagement in protected areas and bio-diversity planning, as well as other rural and cultural development efforts. Local participation is best supported by:

- Identifying the most appropriate process to engage local communities in local area planning either for protected areas or for exceptional natural features, or areas within the NEN
- Ensuring that the collaborative process becomes part of procurement procedures to ensure an open and transparent process
- Engaging local communities in assessing eco-tourism opportunities long before final public hearings on any plans
- Involving local communities in activities related to conservation; promoting and using cultural heritage sites; developing local culture, and planning for cultural tourism including specific participation by local museums, galleries, day centers, and NGOs
- Involving local entrepreneurs and interested parties in the collection and analysis of eco-tourism planning information
- Supporting study exchanges focused on successful community eco-tourism efforts and best practices
- Supporting the development of national and regional networks that also function as a referral service and monitoring agency for effective rural eco-tourism development

5.4.4 Integrate Eco-tourism in Regional Development Plans

Eco-tourism objectives should be integrated into regional and local plans for economic development under the procedures of the National Rural Development Plan process. Community collaboration forums and related approaches should be used, encouraging the local community to become the initiator of eco-tourism opportunities and development. Tourism, including eco-tourism, should be integral parts of these plans and endorsed by government, thus becoming part of the official policies of the regional and local governments.

5.4.5 Replicate the Use of Eco-tourism Related Forums, Events and Celebrations Throughout the Regions in Bulgaria

Eco-tourism forums, fairs and similar events should be used with regularity in Bulgaria's regions and local areas. These events should include activities designed to promote more effective communication and coordination with Bulgarian government and donor programs, decentralized governance, municipal capacity building, and infrastructure development.

6.0 Implementing the Strategy

6.1 Institutionalizing a National Eco-tourism Working Group

Establishing a national mechanism to support the National Eco-tourism Strategy will be central to its success. The National Tourism Council (NTC) is an existing institution under which a national eco-tourism working group could be established. The working group could be charged with finalizing and overseeing the implementation of NETS. It should include representatives of the current member institutions of the NTC and other stakeholders, and be given long-term support by the Bulgarian government. The NTC should periodically review and assess the role of eco-tourism in the National Tourism Strategy. In time, the activities of the working group should be institutionalized in the governmental administration, or ended depending on the success and effectiveness of NETS. The details on who shall participate in the working group, the mandates and responsibilities of its members, and its budget need to be developed and approved by the National Tourism Council.

6.2 Local Government

Local government engagement and leadership is key to the development and promotion of eco-tourism development. Effective implementation of the NETS by local governments will require:

- An understanding and capacity to develop eco-tourism as part of local government planning and operations
- Establishing local mechanisms for ensuring public and private sector engagement in focused eco-tourism development
- Selecting and applying financial mechanisms to support eco-tourism development, such as national budget, matching grants, public-private sector joint ventures, and links to large-scale tourism development
- Developing and implementing by-laws
- Creating and applying incentives
- Developing and implementing a system of monitoring indicators of success and impact

A partnership between the Ministry of Regional Development and the National Association of Bulgarian Municipalities and the Foundation for Local Government Reform, the two national associations that address local government, will help to ensure that eco-tourism is a focus of local government and capacity building. Both the public sector and the national associations must agree to participate in completing the NETS. In doing so, they will build the capacity for their future role in its implementation.

6.3 Financial Mechanisms

Existing finance programs that support eco-tourism can also be used to implement the NETS. These include: EU supported pre-accession funds from SAPARD, PHARE and ISPA, Environmental Activities Management Enterprise Fund, and the new Bulgarian Protected Areas Fund within the National Trust Eco Fund. PHARE cultural tourism funds and eco-tourism funds are immediate sources of financing that can support the implementation of the NETS' 5-year Action Plan. Other financial mechanisms that could be used to support the implementation of the NETS include: loan guarantees from donors to the commercial lending sector, matching grants to local government, and the introduction of incentives for private sector investment in eco-tourism. These mechanisms should be identified as part of the NETS and be developed as part of its 5-year Action Plan. The new municipal tax on tourism should also be viewed as another source of implementation funds.

A decentralized approach to funding eco-tourism should be used by international donors and nationally recognized funding programs. This approach includes:

- supporting projects administered at a regional level that are based on regional action plans and regional priorities
- supporting projects that sub-contract to local government, private, and non-governmental organizations

Decentralization of both the financing and decision-making of eco-tourism projects will result in:

- An increase in the percentage of funds absorbed at regional and local levels
- Reductions in the administrative costs to administer these projects
- An increase in the transparency of project awards and management, greater local accountability and a reduction in corrupt practices

6.4 Geographical Priorities for Eco-tourism Development in Bulgaria

Eco-regions

Eco-tourism linked with nature conservation in Bulgaria revolves around a strategic set of protected areas and landscape features. These protected areas form the core of the national protected areas network and a National Ecological Network, as called for in the Biodiversity Act of 2002. The Network will eventually form a national system of core, protected areas, buffer zones and other key areas of conservation value. Protected areas are regions with high concentrations of biological diversity and specific, unique landscapes providing opportunities for nature-based tourism.

Communities and lifestyles that are supportive of contemporary conservation objectives and sustainable livelihoods in part, determine regions in Bulgaria. These natural and human clusters reflect a strong union. They engender a strong sense of local identity and contribute to the variety and diversity of local customs, cuisine, agricultural practices, architecture and history. A strong sense of "home" and a strong sense of "belonging" to a region are prerequisites for investment and care in the environment. These in turn become the essence of a sustainable tourism approach and Bulgaria's comparative advantage. The very essence of this natural and cultural variety needs to be embraced and promoted through NETS. With a view of categorizing or regionalizing Bulgaria's landscape diversity, efforts have been taken

in the NETS to differentiate various geographical clusters with a key role in developing an eco-tourism network. These are called Eco-tourism regions or Eco-regions.

The description of Eco-regions is based on an approach that examines the overlap and integration of the following elements on a geographical scale:

1. Bulgaria's 28 administrative regions
2. Protected areas that are the focal point of an eco-tourism cluster central to the National Ecological Network, and areas of biodiversity importance outside the national protected areas network that are expected to become part of the National Ecological Network
3. Important cultural sites and monuments of national and international importance. The description of these areas also examined opportunities to strengthen local practices, customs and traditions that (re) build civic pride, and are a source for conserving a village life style and sites of local cultural importance
4. Agricultural practices and products that are indicative of a strong local character, regional production, and micro-climatic conditions
5. Groupings of communities sharing a common watershed within certain landscape characteristics, inducing a sense of geographical identity
6. Presence of eco-tourism associations and networks

The proposed boundaries for Eco-regions are not fixed. They are described here to assist in the implementation of the NETS' strategic objectives. They build on existing regional coalitions of protected areas, culture, and small business. They are common markets and logical advertising and marketing clusters for eco-tourism development, since they form the basis for product development and business coalitions. To develop and succeed, regions will require cooperation across administration boundaries and between regional government centers.

Each region has been selected in an effort to capture the largest regional audience and to encourage local, decentralized implementation of the NETS. Local sustainable tourism associations are seen as key to eco-tourism, and to the success of this NETS over the next 10 years.

6.4.1 Southwestern Eco-region

This Eco-region includes the southern Rila Mountains, the Pirin Mountains, north Belassitsa and the other border mountains, and the Struma River valley. The Rila and Pirin massifs have similar geographical and biological characteristics. Both mountains support exceptional biological diversity and evoke a strong feeling of regional identity, while offering a broad range of opportunities for eco-tourism. The mountain areas at the borders of the country are rather depopulated and economically underdeveloped. Access to state borders have been restricted until recently and as a result there is no tourism infrastructure or local experience with tourism. However, this isolation has contributed to the conservation of nature, culture, and local traditions and a life style of local people that are prerequisites for the development of competitive and attractive eco-tourism products.

The region includes two-thirds of the Blagoevgrad administrative region encompassing the municipalities of Blagoevgrad, Bansko, Razlog, Yakoruda, Belitsa, Gotze Delchev, Hajdimovo, Sandanski, Petrich, Strumiany, Kresna and Simitly, and parts of Rila and Kocherinovo municipalities. It also includes the Struma and Mesta River Valleys, but excludes the Western parts of the Rhodopes.

The Management Plan for Rila National Park and the impending Management Plan for Pirin National Park both offer key opportunities for practical, focused eco-tourism development. While large-scale ski tourism has been the focus in both mountain parks, there is an opportunity to develop and market eco-tourism in this Eco-Region as a year-round economic activity. Rich in local culture and tradition, this region can offer a dramatic sense of alpine, Balkan eco-tourism experience. Additional natural features and sites include the Rila Monastery Nature Park, which includes many nature sites and historical features. The Rila Monastery Nature Park management plan will define an eco-tourism and sustainable development agenda for this significant national and international destination within the Southwestern Eco-region.

There are several Nature Reserves in the region and three of them are within the national parks: Yulen and Bayuvi Dupki- Jinjiricha in Pirin, and Parangalitsa in Rila. Alibotush, Kongura, Sokolata and Orelyak Nature Reserves are outside the parks. The National Ecological Network will eventually include some additional hot spots for bio-diversity and buffer zones in this region, including Belasitsa and Slavyanka, both located close to the border with Greece. The region of Rupite, a protected locality rich in mineral water and perceived as a place of enigmatic spiritual power, has yet to be developed.

Tradition tourist activities are: winter and ski tourism in Bansko-Dobrinishte, balneology in Sandanski, cultural tours of Bansko, Rila Monastery, Melnik and the Rozhen Monastery, and mountain hiking in the alpine parts of Pirin and Rila, where a number of short and long trails, including international trails are marked. About 40% of Bulgaria's mineral waters are in this region, but it is an underutilized tourist resource. This Eco-region is rich in cultural and historical heritage. Heritage is integrated in protected areas and in the natural environment of middle and high conservation value, including Rila Monastery and its Nature Park; Melnik and the Rozhen Monastery, of architectural-artistic and historical-archeological significance, and the villages Kovachevtsi and Dolen, important as historical and architectural reserves.

The area is extremely rich in national monuments of culture of various ages, including the pre-historic sanctuaries near Babyak village and Razlog city, a fortified antique city near Sandanski; the fortified antique and Medieval towns of Nikopolis and Nestum near Gurmen; the medieval King Samuil Fortress, and the historical settlements with local folklore architecture of Delchevo, Teshevo, and Gotse Delchev. The best folklore heritage in the region can be seen at the Folklore Fair, *Pirin Sings*, held every two years in Predela situated between the Rila and Pirin Mountains. In recent years a summer Jazz Festival in Bansko has been gaining popularity.

Traditional land use includes cultivation of the famous broad leaf Melnik vines and keratsuda vines typical for this landscape. It is the birth region of one of the emblematic wines of Bulgaria - Melnik wine. Regional crops are tobacco and potatoes. Cotton growing used to be a tradition for the Sandanski region, but it has lost its importance. Petrich is known for its early spring production of vegetables and fruits including kiwi, lemons, and peaches. Traditional regional dishes are kapama, a varied stewed meat dish, chomlek, and kachamak, a boiled maze flour dish. Wood processing and textile production are traditional local crafts.

The Pirin Tourism Forum is one of four regional tourist organizations operating in the region. In 1998, five local Tourism Councils were established - Bansko, Blagoevgrad, Sandanski, Gotse Delchev and Dobrinishte; only the Blagoevgrad Tourist Council is officially registered. There are Tourist Information Centers in Sandanski, Bansko, and Gotse Delchev, but only

Gotse Delchev is operating effectively. Nature protection organizations in the region have concentrated their efforts on environmental education. The Local Business Centers and Southwest Municipalities Association cover this region.

The British Know-How Fund has been the largest donor program in the Southwest region. Between 1994-1997 it funded the Project for Ecological and Sustainable Tourism (PREST). USAID has supported the development of management plans for Rila National Park and for Rila Monastery Nature Park. The Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program is funding the development of the Pirin National Park Management Plan. Business centers in several municipalities are funded by the UNDP.

There are trans-border eco-tourism opportunities particularly in the region around Petrich and Gotse Delchev, at the borders with Macedonia and Greece respectively. In addition, this Eco-region includes two important reserves on the border with Greece that hold the potential for becoming regional nature parks. The Kresna Gorge, although bisected by the major trunk road to Greece, is still an area of high conservation value.

6.4.2 Eco-region Western Rhodopes

The Rhodopes are among the oldest lands in the Balkans. Millions of years of diverse physico-geographic processes have molded these mountains. This massif can be divided into two quite different parts, western and eastern. The Western Rhodopes are part of the largest mountain massif in southern Bulgaria. The western massif is characterized by extensive well-conserved, representative compact forest formations. Coniferous woods comprise 71% of the forests and deciduous woods 29%. Over 70% of forests in the Western Rhodopes are natural. There are 100 protected areas in the region covering 16,881.55 hectares, including 15 reserves, 25 protected localities and 60 Nature sites.

The Western Rhodopes extends over the administrative regions of Pazarjik, Plovdiv and Smolyan, and Blagoevgrad, and include the municipalities of: Batak, Belovo, Bratsigovo, Velingrad, Peshtera, Rakitovo, Septemvri, Pazarjik, Lesichevo, Panagyurishte, Strelcha, Assevnograd, Rodopi, Lucki, Krichim, Stamboliiski, Perushtitsa, Sadovo, Pervomai, Rakovski, Saedinenie, Plovdiv, Banite, Borino, Devin, Dospat, Zlatograd, Madan, Nedelino, Smolyan, Chepelare, Rudozem, Gurmen and Satovcha.

No parks have been established in this Eco-region, nor have any management plans been developed. It is highly likely that a new Nature Park will be established, and an UNDP-GEF supported project is developing a biodiversity conservation, landscape and local livelihoods program for the region. There are also discussions on a trans-border protected area at the border with Greece. These developments would undoubtedly provide opportunities for future development of this Eco-region. At the present time, relations with Greece on matters related to conservation of nature and the establishment of eco-tourism networks are not well developed.

The general boundaries of the proposed Nature Park in the Western Rhodopes are: the state border to the south, and west to the valley of Mesta to Yundola and on the east, the eastern boundaries of the municipalities of Assenovgrad, Banite, and Smolyan and to the north along the boundaries of the municipalities of Velingrad and Rakitovo, and the mountainous parts of the municipalities of Peshtera, Bratsigovo, Krichim, and Rodopi.

The Western Rhodopes are famous for their natural phenomena/formations such as Chudnite mostove (Wonder Bridges), Trigrad gorge, Dyavolsko Garlo Cave (Devil's Throat), Buynovo gorge, Yagodino Cave, and the rock formations Momata (The Maid), Glavata (The Head), Slonat (The Elephant), and the river valley Arda. The only karst museum in Bulgaria is located in the town of Chepelare. The Western Rhodopes are famous with their winter tourist centers of Pamporovo and Chepelare, where efforts are being made to prolong the active tourist season throughout the year by proposing medical rehabilitation programs and green schools for students. Mineral waters have been used traditionally as a tourist resource in Velingrad, Devin, Banite, and Narechenski bani. The resorts of Tsigov and Chark, near the town of Batak, are popular for holiday tourism. Cultural and historical sites such as those in Shiroka Luka, Batak, and the Bachkovo Monastery are part of the interpretative programs that are offered.

Walking trails are a tradition in the Western Rhodopes where there are some international walking trails. Excursion summer trips have been popular but in the last few years they have gradually disappeared. There have been some initial steps taken to develop rural tourism in the villages of Momchilovtsi, Shiroka Luka, Mogilitsa, Smilyan, Gela, and Stoikite, but they have focused largely on hotel development. The new development of a unique tourist product in town of Trigrad includes visiting caves, horse riding, and mountain hiking trails. Twelve tourist trails have been developed and marked with relevant signage in the eastern parts of the Western Rhodopes. Mountain guides are also available.

The region is characterized by rich cultural and historical heritage, actively integrated in an environment of high and medium conservation value. At the northern boundary of the region is the multi-layer reserve Old Plovdiv, of archeological, architectural, urban and cultural landscape significance. There are a number of important national monuments of various ages: the pre-historic cave dwelling place – Yagoda Cave; the medieval Assen fortress; the Red Church near Perushtitza; the fortified city Tzepina; the Bachkovo Monastery with the Bone-vault, and the Aran and Muldav monasteries. There is a whole constellation of cultural sites near Assenovgrad; the historic church in Batak; the Angushev town hall near Mogilitsa, the historical settlements with folklore architecture in Smolyan, and Renaissance structures in Bratsigovo, Shiroka Luka, Zlatograd, Peshtera, and Panagyurishte. Gela, Solishta, Mugla, and Bukata are small, unique-looking settlements. This Eco-region hosts ancient bridges and 19th century sites such as the Pavilion to King's Residence in Krichim, built after the liberation of Bulgaria from Turkey.

Typical local crafts such as wood and metal processing, weaving, and knitting are still practiced. Folklore traditions are well preserved in the region and annual festivals of national importance are held in Roshen and Shiroka Luka. The new Festival Sun-Moon is held in the town of Trigrad. Tobacco and potatoes are major agricultural crops, and beans from this region are famous. There are attempts to diversify local livelihoods with medical plants/herb cultivation. Traditional dishes are patatnick (potato-based), beans soups and salads, particularly from the Smilyan region.

The communities of Velingrad, Smolyan, Devin, Dospat, Mogilitsa and Shiroka Luka are characterized by a growing common awareness of local, social integrity. Slowly, successful centers for local eco-tourism initiatives and regional networking are being established. There are several local tourist NGOs working in the region: the Youth Ecological Organization Rhodopes in Shiroka Luka; the Eco-tourism Council in Mogilitsa; Partners for Local Development in Devin, and the Center for Development of Zlatograd Municipality are

examples. Hoteliers and restaurants are also active. The Association of Rhodope Municipalities, the Center for Sustainable Development of the Mountain in Smolyan, and business centers in the region are seen as potential focal points for eco-tourism development. There are Tourist Information Centers in Smolyan, Shiroka Luka, Devin, Chepelare, and Zlatograd. The Rhodope Regional Tourism Association is a recently registered organization that reflects an active regional tourism effort.

Donor programs included the UNDP-GEF funded project. One aspect of this project is the assessment of nature, cultural and historic resources as primary resources eco-tourism development. The Green Balkans Conservation Association has played a significant role in this effort. The British Know-How Fund, GTZ – Government of Germany, PHARE for mining regions, PHARE TGS and PHARE Roads, and USAID have all contributed to development in the region.

6.4.3 *Eco-region Eastern Rhodopes*

The Eastern Rhodopes are part of the largest mountain massif in Southern Bulgaria – the Rhodopes, with an overall area of about 6 000sq. km. The Eastern Rhodopes are characterized by a wide diversity of habitats. Strong Mediterranean influences, the geologic history of the mountains, and characteristic features of local customs and culture, create a strong conservation environment in this region. There are 85 protected areas in the region including one reserve, 19 protected localities and 65 nature landmarks, for a total area of approximately 6, 449 hectares.

The Eastern Rhodopes Eco-region includes areas in the Haskovo and Kerdjali regions in the municipalities of Kerdjali, Krumovgrad, Momchilgrad, Ardino, Kirkovo, Jebel, Chernoochene, Ivailovgrad, Stambolovo, and Majarovo, and parts of the municipalities of Harmanli, Mineralni Bani, Svilengrad and Lyubimets. The mountainous part of this region is poorly developed socially and economically. There are a number of remote settlements lacking basic infrastructure, including water supply and communications. Transport systems are generally underdeveloped.

As discussed in the previous section on the Western Rhodope Eco-region, there are no parks in this region; however a new Nature Park may be designated. There are discussions about trans-border protected areas on the border with Greece. Two options for an Eastern Rhodopes Nature Park have been proposed. The larger option would encompass 274, 067 hectares encompassing the municipalities of Ivailovgrad and Majarovo, and parts of seven others: Svilengrad, Lyubimets, Harmanli, Stambolovo, Karjali, Momchilgrad and Krumovgrad. The smaller option would be 192 582 hectares encompassing the municipalities of Ivailovgrad and Majarovo, and parts of five municipalities: Lyubimets, Stambolovo, Karjali, Momchilgrad and Krumovgrad.

The Eastern Rhodopes have a limited tourism tradition. In recent years, the local branch of the Bulgarian Association for Protection of Birds and their Majarovo Nature Protection Center have carried out some pilot eco-tourism-oriented initiatives in the town of Majorovo, concentrating on bird observation. There is also an annual regatta along the Arda River. The region is characterized by a diversity of minerals and well-designed packages of mineral stones could be of interest to visitors. The land pyramids in the Karjali region attract tourists.

This Eco-region is characterized by an outstanding synthesis of natural environment and cultural and historical heritage. The region's Thracian heritage is evident here, represented by the Thracian Domed Sepulcher with unique wall paintings near Alexandrovo village; the domed sepulcher near Mezek village, and the rock niches near Vransko, N. Bozvelievo and Tatul. Of great value are: the antique villa with unique mosaic work near Ivailovgrad; the medieval rock churches near Mihalich and Matochina; the fortresses in Mezek, Perperikon (Gorna Krepost village) and near Ustren; the monastery in Veselchani quarter in Kerjali city, and the bridge over Yantra River near Svilengrad. Traditional textile crafts are comparatively well preserved. Pitifully, the tradition of folklore song festival in the village of Stambolovo has been eliminated for financial reasons, but there are intentions to revive this event. Tourist marketing and promotion of the region are absent.

Agriculture in the region is characterized by tobacco production. Tobacco plantations contribute to the specific cultural landscape reflecting the identity of the region. In recent years donors have supported experiments with alternative crops, mostly medicinal plants.

NGOs that work with tourism issues are concentrated in the region of Kerdjali, and several intend to set up in smaller municipal centers in places like Kirkovo. In addition to the BSPB and their branch operations in Majarovo, there is an NGO information center in Karjali and a newly established Eastern Rhodopes regional tourist organization. There are no established tourist centers, except for the conservation information and education center in Majarovo.

The largest donor working in the region is the Swiss government, through the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program (BSBCP). All of the initiatives in Majarovo have been supported by the BSBCP, including the proposal for designating an Eastern Rhodopes Nature Park. The BSBCP worked on preparing a proposed GEF project for sustainable livelihoods in the Rhodopes that included an assessment of opportunities for sustainable tourism in the region. Other donor programs include PHARE for mining regions, PHARE-TGZ and PHARE-Roads.

6.4.4 Eco-region Strandja and the Southern Black Sea Coast

This Eco-Region includes the watersheds of the northern Strandja Mountains, west to the Sakar Hills, south to the border with Turkey, and east to the Black Sea coast. The region includes the municipalities of Sozopol, Malko Turnovo, Tsarevo, Sredets, Boliarovo and Elhovo. The Strandja Nature Park has worked to engage regional and local government in its planning and management activities. The Park Directorate is developing and promoting eco-tourism in select communities, despite serious shortages of staff and funds. Additional protected areas include the Ropotamo Nature Reserve; the delta of the Ropotamo River and Snake Island; the mouth of the Veleka River; the rocky caves and niches along the coast, and the protected area of Silistar south of Sinemorets, one of the last sanctuaries for the monk seal. The National Ecological Network will include additional *hot spots* of biodiversity conservation and their buffer zones within this Eco-region.

The characteristic natural attractions are bird observations; the botanical phenomena in the dunes along the south Black Sea coast; the unique populations of water lilies in the Ropotamo River; large oak woods, and otters in the Sakar River. The symbol of the region is the Strandja periwinkle (*Vinca*), a unique evergreen plant with poisonous leaves and gorgeous blossoms. The cultural and historical heritage of the region is preserved in four Reserves: the Old Part of Sozopol, an architectural-historical and tourist reserve with architectural

monuments of value; the islands St. Ivan and St. Peter with their adjacent aquatory at Sozopol; the village of Brashlyan, an architectural and historical reserve, and the antique and medieval town of Deultum-Debelt, an archeological reserve. There is a network of pre-historical dolmens in the villages of Belevren, Gorno Yabalkovo, Granichal, and Hlyabovo; Thracian sites near Malko Turnovo and Mishkova niva; a medieval earth-work bank that is 120 km long between the Black Sea and the Maritsa River; and settlements with local folklore architecture such as Malko Turnovo and Petrova Niva.

The unique nestinar dances (maids dancing on burning coals) performed in the village of Bulgari are of enormous tourism potential. Each summer Sozopol hosts a national cultural event - Apolonia. The traditional livelihood of the people at the coast is connected with sea, and those in the mountains with the forest. There are few agricultural lands in the region. Traditional dishes are lopushka, a fish dish, Strandja bee honey, and spicy meat sausages.

The Eco-Region of Strandja/Sakar and South Black Sea coast offers an uncharacteristic link between coastal tourism with an area of exceptional biodiversity. Bulgarian tourism investors focus mainly along the Black Sea coast; however there are opportunities to link the tourism market at the south coast to eco-tourism in the hills behind the coast. The Strandja area has great opportunities, with potentially beneficial results to investors, local communities and tourists.

The regional NGO sector is concentrated along Black Sea coast, with local tourism associations supporting tourist informational centers in Sozopol, Primorsko and Tsarevo. At the regional level, the Burgas Association for Ecological and Rural Tourism is actively coordinating the activities of its 36 individual and 19 registered members. The Strandja Nature Park Directorate is most active inside the region. They support several information centers as well as some small, local organizations in a couple of villages. In January 2003, a new visitors center opened in the Ropotamo Reserve, owned and operated by the Ministry of Environment and Water. The most active NGO in the region is the BSPBP for which Strandja is a priority region. Recently some of the local NGOs succeeded in attracting EU grants to improve local infrastructure.

The close geographic linkages to Greece and Turkey and the need to manage tourism development in the area are challenges facing this Eco-Region. Links with the remaining parts for the Strandja Mountains in Turkey, which are remnant geological and biodiversity aspects of the Caucas Mountains, are among the most promising regional eco-tourism opportunities.

6.4.5 Eco-region Eastern Balkan (Stara Planina)

This Eco-Region is largely undeveloped and undescribed, despite its attractive parts in the eastern Stara Planina, the Sinite Kamani Nature Park, and the areas of eastern Stara Planina of high and medium biodiversity conservation value. The Eco-Region's northern boundary runs up to the northern slopes of the most eastern part of the Stara Planina range. Its western boundary is the basin of the Radova River, and to the south the foothills of Aitos. It runs east to Pomorie and Nessabar on the Black Sea coast. The region includes the municipalities of Sliven, Kotel, Sungurlare, Ruen, Kableshkovo, Nessebar, Tvarditsa, Burgas and Aitos.

There is limited eco-tourism outreach and development in this region and an absence of active small business development efforts. While there are good opportunities to combine nature tourism with traditional tourism in this region, Bulgarian tourism investors remain largely

focused on the Black Sea coast. A management plan for the Siniti Kamini Nature Park is being developed that will include eco-tourism objectives. Additional nature sites include Pomorie Lake, Atanassovsko Lake, and Vaya Lak, with a pelican observation point, and all wetlands around the town of Burgas. The BSPB Poda nature protection center, located near the Poda protected locality of 1998, has received more than 50,000 tourists so far. The National Ecological Network will eventually include *hot spots* of bio-diversity and their buffer zones in this Eco-region.

Among the cultural and historical sites that stand out is the old part of Nessebar, a Monument of Culture and a Reserve of World Conservation Value. Three Bulgarian Renaissance Architectural Reserves of great value are located in the region: the old part of Kotel, Jeravna village and Katunishte village. There are also a number of settlements, for example Gradets, Ichera, and Medven with local folklore architecture, contributing to the image of a specific cultural and historical zone, integrated in a natural environment of high conservation value. Of particular interest is the antique sepulcher in Pomorie, the earthwork bank Erkesia crossing the region, and St. Anastasia Monastery on the island that bears its name near Burgas. A cultural calendar of the region includes festival events in Burgas such as the International Folklore Festival and Sea Songs. Kotel has a tradition of carpet making. Agricultural activities include the famous wine and brandy production of Sungurlare, Karnobat, Yambol, and Pomorie, and peaches from the region of Sliven.

Eco-region Eastern Stara Planina offers an unusual combination of eco-tourism as an alternative for mass tourism on the Black sea coast. Initial steps at eco-tourism have been made with bird observation trips to the Burgas wetlands, with the support of Bulgarian- Swiss Program for Biodiversity Conservation. The Burgas Regional Tourist Association is one of the nation's four regional tourist organizations. The only Bulgarian beaches participating in the Blue Flag international certification system are in this Eco-region.

Again, the BSPBP is the most active international donor in the region, and the wetlands in Burgas are among its top priorities. For the last three years, the British Know-How Fund has funded a number of social programs here

6.4.6 Eco-region Central Balkan National Park, South

Common landscape features and access issues largely define this Eco-Region. It includes the low mountains north of the Sofia-Plovdiv highway up to the southern slopes of the Central Stara Planina. The Sofia-Yablanitsa highway defines its western boundaries, and the connector road between Kazanluk and Stara Zagora forms the eastern boundary. This Eco-region embraces the Rose Valley and Middle Forest (Sredna Gora) area, a superb cultural and historical zone. The Eco-Region includes the regional administrations of Sofia, Pazardjik, Plovdiv, and Stara Zagora.

This Eco-Region remains one of the least explored, but with a high potential for eco-tourism development, drawing clients from the Sofia and Plovdiv area. There is an exceptional diversity of nature and cultural sites close to both urban centers that are largely undiscovered and under-developed. Central to this area is the southern slope of Central Balkan National Park, with the Stryama and Tundja River watersheds on the southern macro-slope of Central Stara Planina.

Nature sites of interest in the national park are the waterfall Raisko Praskalo (Paradise Spray), the Karlovo Waterfall, and the canyon of South Djendem at Byala Reka (White River). The National Ecological Network will eventually include some *hot spots* for biodiversity and their buffer zones within the region.

The Central Balkan National Park has recently adopted a management plan that will be in effect until 2010. The plan has a strong model for eco-tourism development in Kalofer. The Kalofer effort will need time to develop before capacity it could be used as a regional model. There is poor eco-tourism infrastructure development in the area and few strong, local entrepreneurial models.

Cultural and historical tourism developed in the region on the basis of local rich cultural heritage. There are the Thracian sepulcher with unique wall paintings in Kazanluk, a World Heritage Site, and four Reserves: the antique city in Hissar surrounded by fortified wall, the architectural and historical reserves in Koprivshitzta and Svejen, and the National Park-Museum Shipka- Buzludja. Thracian heritage is strongly represented by a network of Thracian mounds/tumuli in the Valley of Thracian Rulers near Kazanluk. There is a Thracian necropolis near Starosel with the largest and most representative under-the-mould Thracian temple-sepulcher in the Balkans. There is a network of settlements with local folklore architecture and historical sites in addition to the reserves mentioned, including Karlovo, Sopot, and Kalofer.

Agricultural activities in this Eco-region include the extraction of ethereal oils from roses, lavender and different herbs. The Valley of Roses offers many opportunities for tourism development, including the annual Festival of Roses. For the last few years an organic agriculture program has been in operation, extending opportunities for eco-tourism and local agricultural production. Another characteristic of the region is the annual collection of wild fruits and mushrooms, practiced mostly within the Central Balkan National Park. This could become an eco-tourism focal point as well. This region supports world famous balneological treatment centers at Banya, Pavel Banya, and Hissarya, where the ancient fortress and tomb of Hissarya can still be seen.

There are three small local tourist associations in Kazanluk, Hissarya, and Koprivshitzta that are doing their best to support Tourist Informational Centers. For a year now, there has been an eco-tourism center in Kalofer, with a newly registered association and tourist informational center. The Bioselena Foundation and the Bio Bulgaria Cooperative are both dealing with sustainable agriculture. International donors that have been active in this region include the United States Agency for International Development, the Swiss Government, UNDP and GTZ.

6.4.7 Eco-region Vitosha – Northern Rila

This eco-region comprises Vitosha Nature Park, the northern part of Rila National Park and its eastern, middle and northwestern part (Lakatniskha Rila), and the smaller mountains of Verila, Plana, and Lozenska. The region includes parts of the administrative regions of Sofia-city, Sofia, Pernik and Kyustendil. There are areas of rich biodiversity and well-developed conservation systems, and both parks have management plans. This Eco-region includes the natural attractions of Seven Rila Lakes, the Malyovitsa section of Rila National Park, and the springs of the Maritsa River, originating from the Marichini lakes. The National Ecological Network will eventually include additional *hot spots* of biodiversity conservation and their buffer zones within the region.

Cultural and historical heritage of value located in Sofia and Sofia municipality to the north include Boyana Church, a World Heritage Site, renowned for its remarkable wall paintings. There is the Serdika-Sredets Reserve, the Boris Garden, and the Dendrarium in Sofia. The region is characterized by a network of monasteries known as Sofia Sveta Gora (Sofia Holy Wood) that includes the: Kremikovski, Dragalevski, Seslavski, Iliensky, Eleshnichki, Kurilski, and Dolnolozenski Monasteries. The St. Dimiter monastery and St. Todor Church are located in Bobeshevo and both have conservation value. Samokov hosts the famous Bulgarian Renaissance Artistic School and the Bairakly Muslim Church, a national monument. The traditions of woodcarving, metal work, and linen production are still alive in this Eco-region. Agricultural activities include the production of potatoes, some wheat and corn, flax and sunflowers.

There are many historic practices that have tourism potential. The wildlife reserve, or hunting reserve, near Studena dam and the so-called Iskar Ranch are destinations that should be considered in planning for eco-tourism. The areas along Iskar River, such as the dam, Passarel and Pancharevo Lake have potential. Vitosha Mountain itself is a traditional site for short mountain walks, adventure sports, and ski tourism. The mountain resorts of Borovets and Malyovitsa are centers for winter sports in this Eco-region. Efforts are being made to diversify the traditional tourism products offered by these resorts by providing additional services in surrounding area. Balneological tourism, or mineral water baths, is offered in the settlements of Momin Prohod, Dolnya Banya and Sapareva Banya, which have resorts of ancient importance.

A number of organizations are potential partners for both parks in the region, including the Friends of Vitosha Nature Park; the Agrolink Association; the Sapareva Banya Tourism Council; and a newly organized Eco-tourism Center in Samokov. The Rila Eco-tourism Association-Samokov, a strong local eco-tourism association in this Eco-region works as a partner with Rila National Park in promoting eco-tourism in the park. Rila National Park operates and maintains a modern Visitor Center in Panichishte, high above Sapareva Banya. Vitosha Nature Park has the first Visitor Center in Bulgaria, established with support from the United States Agency for International Development. The UNDP has also supported projects in this Eco-region.

6.4.8 Western Border Eco-region

The region represents a mosaic of low mountains and hills and the higher Rila, Kanyavska, and Osogovo Mountains. This Eco-region lies in parts of the regional administrations of Sofia, Pernik and Kyustendil, and includes the municipalities along Bulgaria's western border from the towns of Godech and Dragoman in the north, to Kyustendil in the south. There are no large protected areas, but this Eco-region includes border zones that have remained largely unpopulated. There is the Zemen Gorge with its natural rock formations, unexplored caves and waterfalls, and the Trun eco-trail. The Erma and Nishava river valleys are exceptionally attractive. These resources could be explored and developed as trans-boundary itineraries and include the monasteries of historical significance across the border in Serbia.

The region comprises valuable cultural and historical heritage. The antique and medieval town Pautalia-Velbujd in the center of Kyustendil is an architectural and archeological reserve. It includes the Muslim Church Fetih Mohammed from the Bulgarian Renaissance and post Turkish Liberation period. A network of monasteries, including Rakovishki, Zemenski, Malomalovski, Bilinski, Trunski, and Peshterski are in this Eco-region, as well as St. George,

a medieval church; the Kolusha quarter in Kyustendil; the fortress in Pernik, and the Kadin Bridge in Nevestino.

Hot mineral water springs are natural features of Kyustendil and Nevestino. Pernik is one of the European Festival Towns, with its biannual Kukerie festival. There is a local Tourism Council in Kyustendil. There are no donor programs supporting tourism development in this region. However, there is a good relationship between Bulgarian and Serbian conservationists and scientists, which can be built on for cooperation and eventual eco-tourism product development.

6.4.9 Eco-region Western Balkan (Stara Planina)

This Eco-Region includes the northern slopes of the Western Stara Planina from the Serbian border east to the Iskar Valley. This area is characterized by important, localized biodiversity, the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park, and the newly evolving trans-boundary protected area between Serbia and Bulgaria, linking a Serbian nature park with the Chuprene Biosphere Reserve in Bulgaria. This region is characterized by a rich variety of traditional local Bulgarian culture, moderately high mountains, and stunning landscape features, for which Belogradchik is most famous. It includes the regional administrations of Vratsa, Montana, Vidin and Sofia.

Vrachansky Balkan Nature Park is in the midst of developing its 10-year management plan. The Park Directorate is active in developing Bulgaria's first eco-adventure trail, which serves as a destination attraction for many tourists. The Regional Environment Center is the sponsor of a trans-boundary protected area planning project, and is working to protect critical conservation areas of the mountains in the far west on the border with Serbia. Based on a proposal on behalf of Belogradchik, the government is considering the designation of a Belogradchik rocks nature park. This park may eventually expand into the trans-boundary, Western Stara Planina Nature Park. Natural sites of particular importance are the Belogradchik Rocks; Chiprovets Waterfall; the Kouklite (The Dolls) formations; Rabishkata Cave (Magurata), with prehistoric drawings on the rock walls; Ledenika Cave, and the Koprenska eco-trail. The National Ecological Network will eventually include some *hot spots* for biodiversity and their buffer zones in this region.

Cultural and historical sites in this Eco-region include the cave dwelling place, Magurata, with its unique masterpieces of pre-historical art and cave habitats; Samuilitza and Provertenika (Kunino village); the Chiprovski, Osenovlashki, Lopushanski, Iskretski, Sedemte prestola (Seven Thrones), and Etropolski monasteries; the Belogradchik Fortress, and the historical settlements with preserved Bulgarian Renaissance structures in Vratsa and Etropole. Chiprovets is known for its woolen carpets, as well as its banitsa and pies, a reflection of local culture.

The region does not have a tradition of tourism, except visitors to the two caves and to the local monasteries. The Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park Directorate has taken the first steps towards eco-tourism in this Eco-region, concentrating on the development of a system of eco-trails within the park. Links are being established with communities to offer accommodation, dining or other services.

There is no existing network or active association working in the area of eco-tourism. In 2002, the National Informational and Ecology Education Center was established in Chiprovski. A

local Tourist Council has organized. A potential focal point for eco-tourism development is the new REC trans-boundary project. The Regional Environmental Center in Budapest is the only important donor providing support for eco-tourism programs in this region, under the Stability Pact.

6.4.10 Eco-region Central Balkan National Park, North

This Eco-Region includes the watersheds of rivers on the northern macro-slope of Stara Planina, north to the plateau overlooking the Danube. The Little Iskar River roughly forms its western boundaries, and the boundary extends on the east to the Old River that forms the boundary of the Veliko Turnovo regional administration. The Eco-Region includes the regional administrations of Lovech, Gabrovo and Veliko Turnovo.

The new Bulgarka Nature Park, designated in 2002, is located just outside of Gabrovo and is approximately 22,000 hectares. Natural landmarks include the Nature Park and parts of the Central Balkan National Park; the unique forests of reserves Boatin, Tsarichina, Steneto, North Djendem, and Peeshti Skali (Singing Rocks), 30 waterfalls with height over 20 meters, and the geophenomena Kosya Stena. These areas have observation points for birds and wild life. The National Ecological Network will include additional *hot spots* of biodiversity conservation and their buffer zones from this region.

The cultural and historical heritage of this Eco-region is encompassed in a significant regional concentration of reserves. These include the fortified antique city Nikopolis and Istrum, near Nikyup; part of Veliko Ternovo city and Arbanassi village; the medieval fortress, Hissarya, and part of Varosha quarter in Lovech city. There is the old part of Tryavna city and architectural and historical ensemble Angel Kunchev; the architectural and ethnographic ensemble Etara; Bojentsy village, and the old part of Stefanovo village. The network of monasteries is remarkable: Sokolski, Dryanovski, Preobrajenski, Plakovski, Kapinovski, Kalifarevski, Veliko Turnovo, and Sveta Gora. There are churches of great value with beautiful wall-paintings in Veliko Turnovo, Elena, Arbanassi, and Gabrovo, and settlements with local folklore architecture such as Teteven, Troyan, Sevlievo, Gabrovo (the capital of humor), Skortzite, Dryanovo, Zlataritsa, and Elena. The cave dwellings in Morovitsa, Topla, Devetashka, Bacho Kiro, and Momini Caves attract tourists.

Agricultural production in this Eco-region includes fruit trees and the famous local plum brandy from Troyan and Teteven. The region supports a favorable microclimate for growing grape varieties around the towns of Veliko Turnovo, Sevlievo and Lovech.

The Central Balkan National Park Management Plan supports an eco-tourism outreach and development agenda for this Eco-region. There is an active small business development effort supported by both donor initiative and private Bulgarian investors. Existing tourist practices are very similar to the eco-tourism concept underlying the NETS. From Teteven and Ribaritsa in the west to Gabrovo in the east, there is a network of family hotels throughout many settlements. There are cultural and historical tours offered that focus on the ancient city of Veliko Turnovo, and programs that include visits to a number of wine cellars in the Eco-region.

The village Cherni Ossam is developing as a center for environmental education and an Information and Educational Center, including a natural science museum, has been established with the support of the Central Balkan National Park. The first Vocational School

for Mountain Guides has been set up in the same village. There is an information and visitor center in the town of Ribaritsa, set up with the assistance of Central Balkan National Park, the Peace Corps, and USAID. The regional tourist association in Stara Planina is supported by the Swiss government and supports a network of local tourism associations in Tryavna, Teteven, Apriltsi, Gabrovo, Troyan, Sevlievo and Dryanovo. The association maintains basic tourist information centers in these towns. The main donor support for the region has come from USAID, the Swiss Government, GTZ and UNDP.

6.4.11 Eco-region Northern Black Sea Coast and Dobrudja

This Eco-Region's northern boundary is the border with Romania east of the Black Sea coast, then south to the northern slopes of the eastern Stara Planina foothills, and west to the Stara Reka River valley. It encompasses all of the Varna administrative region, the municipalities of Balchik, Kavarna and Shabla in the Dobrich administrative region, and the municipalities in the southern parts of the Shumen and Targovishte administrative region - Novi Pazar, Kaspichan, Shumen, Smyadovo, Varbitsa, Targovishte, Omurtag and Antonovo.

The Zlatni Piassatsi and Shumensko Plato Nature Parks are in this Eco-region. Popular and widely visited conventional tourism sites are located along the coast south and north of Varna. Along with its sister Eco-Regions of Stara Planina East, this Eco-region is an area renowned as a seasonal migration corridor for birds from Eastern and Central Asia to Africa and the Near East. This event is little exploited by mass tourism along the coast or by international specialty tours. Other natural sites include the mouth of Kamchia River, the Baltata reserve near the Albena resort, and the protected locality Ailata, near to Kamen Bryag. There are the Kaliakra and Shabla Lake protected areas, the natural landmark Pobitite Kamani near Varna, and the Balchik botanical gardens. Large parts of the Shumen Plateau have been evaluated as areas of middle to high conservation value. The National Ecological Network will eventually include additional *hot spots* of biodiversity conservation and their buffer zones within the region.

The cultural and historic wealth of the region includes the rock relief Madara Konnik (Rider), a World Heritage site, and a network of antique and medieval reserves including the antique city Martsianopolis ruins near Reka Devnya; the antique city Odessos in Varna; the Old City, Preslav Area, the Historical and Archeological Zone east of Madara village; the Inner Pliska City Area, surrounded by stone fortified wall; the Archeological Zone Yailata near Kavarna, and the Medieval Fortress in Kaliakra. Also of great interest are the pre-historical settlements with a necropolis and medieval fortifications near Durankulak; antique and medieval fortresses near Balchik; a medieval fortress near Shumen; the medieval fortifications along the Black Sea coast in Kranevo and Asparuh, and the network of monasteries in Aladja, Lopushanki, Ravna and the Tombul muslim church in Shumen.

This Eco-region is known as the granary of Bulgaria. There is a strong tradition of large-scale grain production and extensive gardening of apricots and apples. To the south and north of Varna there are a number of quite popular conventional seaside tourism sites. In recent years attempts have been made to diversify the tourist product by including visits to neighboring villages for picnics and folklore demonstrations. Some of the local NGOs have taken the initiative to develop eco-tourism and are offering accommodation and other tourist services in the villages of Kamen Bryag and Byala, where there is a paleontology study center. Management plans for the Zlatni Piassatsi and Shumensko Plato Nature Parks are being

developed and will propose partnership programs with mass tourism businesses on the Black Sea coast, offering coastal visitors trips of 1-3 days for cultural and nature tourism purposes.

The Varna Tourist Chamber operates in this Eco-region. Local tourist councils have been set up in Balchik, Shabla, Dobrich, Kavarna, and Kranevo. The Balchik Tourist Council is especially active and recently took the initiative to combine efforts with all the local associations to develop a common marketing plan for the region. There are Information Centers in Varna and Balchik, and a Nature Protection Center has been established in Kaliakra with the support of Bulgarian-Swiss Program. A local visitor center, developed with private funds, has been established at the village and wetland of Durankulak, but is not yet open. A group of nature protection NGOs are working in Varna where they have initiated a number of projects, including one for the villages Kamen Bryag and Byala. The group includes Foundation Mayday, the youth eco-organization Eco-mission, Friends of the Sea Club, and the Community Center for Environment and Sustainable Development. Le Balkan Foundation is developing an information center for Durankulak Lake.

The Bulgarian-Swiss Program for Biodiversity Conservation is the most active donor in this Eco-region, and Kaliakra is among its priority regions. The Association of the Burgas Black Sea Municipalities is implementing a program “Innovation Practices for Mobilizing Municipal Resources”, funded by USAID. There are other small and medium-sized projects funded by USAID, the British Know-How Fund, the Foundation Open Society, and the PHARE Program.

6.4.12 Eco-region Danube River Wetlands

The Danube River forms this Eco-Region’s northern boundary, and its southern boundary is largely formed by the Danube River floodplain and includes the Beli and Cherni Lom river valleys. This Eco-Region includes parts of the municipalities of Vidin, Montana, Pleven, Veliko Turnovo, Russe and Silistra, and all the municipalities along the Danube and the municipalities of Dve Mogili and Hlebarovo.

The Russenski Lom Nature Park and the Srebarna Reserve, listed as a World Natural and Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, are in this Eco-region. The Srebarna Reserve management plan is being implemented, and management plans for the Kalimok – Brashlen protected area, the Persina Nature Park at Belene Island, and the Russenski Lom Nature Park will be developed. Twelve IBAs are already located along the River, and the western-most are known from the Orsoya Fish Ponds, east along the Danube to Silistra.

Traditional local tourism included short and longer boat rides and regattas along the Danube and bird observation in the Srebarna Reserve and other wetlands. The Russenski Lom Nature Park Directorate is actively implementing projects that would make the Park into an impressive tourist attraction that would include canyon trekking and visits to historical sites.

This Eco-region’s cultural and historic heritage include the rock churches with their unique frescoes, a World Heritage and Archeological and Artistic Reserve, near Ivanovo, and the reserves: Antique Fortress Augusta in Kaletovo; Herlets village; the Medieval City Cherven and the surrounding area; the Archeological Zone of Orlova Chuka Cave near Pepelina, and the Ancient Settlement Dorostrum-Druster in Silistra. There is also an historic place in the valley of the Tekir Dere River near Svishtov. Although it is not within this Eco-region, the Sbornovo Reserve with the Thracian Sepulcher near Sveshtari, a World Heritage site, and

the Demir Baba Teke, are directly linked to it and well integrated into the natural environment. Antique monuments of significance include the fortified cities of Ratsiaria near Archar and Nove near Svishtov, the medieval fortress Babini Vidini Kuli (Towers) in Vidin and the fortress near Nikopol. There is a network of monasteries including Dobridolski and Svishtovski, and the churches in Vidin and Svishtov, including the Krustata Barracks, the Pazvantooglu Muslim Church, and the Jewish Synagogue in Vidin. The cities of Russe and Svishtov, the two Bulgarian Gates to Europe in the late 19th century, have buildings and structures from the post-Turkish period, that were influenced by West European architecture.

Traditional livelihoods in the region are associated with the Danube River, such as fishing, sturgeon farming, and trading. Agricultural activity in the Danube lowlands includes wheat and grapes for wine production. The largest apricot fruit gardens are located in Silistra, and apricot brandy is one of the region's products.

There are local tourist councils and initiatives in Russe, Svishtov, Tutrakan, and Silistra, and Information Centers in Russe and Tutrakan. The Agency for Regional Development in Russe is active and there is a relatively new business center incubator, supporting the development of small and medium-scale businesses.

The Danube River presents challenges and opportunities to offering a variety of very different activities than those associated with more traditional eco-tourism development in the mountains. Since there are so many challenges to developing eco-tourism in this extensive region, the NETS recommendation is to concentrate regional eco-tourism efforts initially within the eastern part of this Eco-region. The area of concentration would be along the Danube between Svishtov and Silistra, including the Russenski Lom Nature Park. Russe is the most logical center for eco-tourism and cultural and historical heritage tourism in this part of the Eco-region. The wetland areas along the Danube can be attractive sites for a host of eco-tourism opportunities. Russenski Lom Nature Park and the Srebarna Reserve, listed as a World Natural and Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, support important bird habitats that can be the basis of a whole new set of aquatic and ornithological eco-tourism and sustainable tourism activities.

Donor initiatives include the GOB/World Bank-GEF Project in Belene and Kalimok. In the 1990s, USAID and the World Bank supported efforts to improve the ecological situation in Srebarna Reserve. Le Balkan Association is now operating significant conservation and eco-tourism projects in the Reserve. The Austrian government is supporting a business center in Russe, and the UNDP has several programs and sites in the region.

ЕКОТУРИСТИЧЕСКИ РЕГИОНИ В БЪЛГАРИЯ

ECO-TOURISM REGIONS IN BULGARIA



Културно Наследство
Cultural Heritage

● Историческо селище
Historical Settlement

○ Извънселищен паметник на културата
Historical Monument / Site in the Countryside

○ Режим на опазване
Културно-Исторически Резерват
Regime of protection
Historical Reserve

⊕ Паметник на културата
от световно значение
World Cultural Heritage

Легенда

Екотуристически региони — Ecotourism Regions
Общини — Municipalities
Защитени територии — Protected areas

Степен на консервационна
значимост

Ниска — Low
Средна — Medium
Висока — High

Legend

Югозапад 1 South-West
Западни Родопи 2 Western Rhodopes
Източни Родопи 3 Eastern Rhodopes
Странджа и Южно Черноморие 4 Strandja and Southern Black Sea
Източна Стара планина 5 Eastern Balkans
Централен Балкан Юг 6 Central Balkans, South
Витоша Северна Рила 7 Vitosha - and Northern Rila
Западен крайграничен 8 Western Border
Врачански Балкан и Западна Стара планина 9 Vrachanski Balkan and Western Balkans
Централен Балкан Север 10 Central Balkans, North
Северно Черноморие и Добруджа 11 Northern Black Sea and Dobrudja
Влажни зони по река Дунав 12 Danube River Wetlands

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1*Non-Governmental Organizations and Institutions Involved in Eco-tourism**National Organizations*

- BAAT
- BARET
- Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds
- Green Balkans Federation
- Wilderness Balkan Association
- Foundation Bulgarian- Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program and Nature Protection Centers
- TIME – Eco-projects Association
- Civil Society Development Foundation
- Ecological Information and Education Center – Sofia
- Borrowed Nature Association – Sofia

*Regional Associations**North-East Region*

- Mayday Foundation – Varna
- Eco-mission Youth organization – Varna
- Friends of the Sea Club – Varna
- Municipal Center for Environment and Sustainable Development – Varna
- Varna Tourist Chamber
- Friends of Byala Association – Byala
- Tourism Association – Tutrakan
- Initiative Group for Sustainable Development –Silistra
- Tourism Council – Balchik
- Le Balkan Foundation – Shabla
- Varna Free University

Northern- Central Region

- Regional Tourist Association Stara Planina and Local Tourism Associations
- Nature Association – Ribaritsa village

North-Western Region

- Friends of Vrachanski Balkan NP Club
- Association of Etropole Municipality Youth for Development
- Tourism Council – Chiprovtsi

South-Eastern Region

- Burgas Regional Tourist Association
- Burgas Trade Chamber
- Burgas Association for Ecological and Rural Tourism

Southern- Central Region

- Plovdiv University
- Mountain Sustainable Development Center – Smolyan
- Tourism Council - Mogilitsa
- Regional Development Agency – Smolyan
- Association of the Rhodopean Restaurant and Hotel Owners
- Rhodope Master Craftsmen Association
- Zlatograd Center for Municipal Development
- Zlatograd Regional Educational Center 21
- Trigrad Foundation
- Partners in Local Development Association - Devin
- Partners in Local Development Association - Madan
- Local Development Center - Buhovo
- Devin Business Center
- Youth Eco-Association Rhodopes – Shiroka Luka
- Traditional Culture and Sustainable Development Association – Chepelare
- Business and Information Center – Velingrad
- Female Association for Human Rights and Ethnic Tolerance – Banite
- Unique Rhodopes Association – Banite
- Eastern Rhodopes Tourist Association – Kurdjali
- Tourist and Nature Protection Center –Karlovo
- Central Balkan – Kalofer Ecotourism Association
- Rhodopes Regional Tourist Organization - Smolyan

South-Western Region

- Pirin Tourist Forum
- Zlatna Struma Foundation – Sandanski
- Business Incubator – Gotse Delchev
- Rila Eco-tourist Association - Samokov

APPENDIX 2

Tourism Information and Education Centers in Bulgaria**Tourism Information Center Mogilitsa**

4700 Smolyan/ Mogilitsa

Tel.: 089/ 878 202

Tourism Information Center - Orehovo

4870 Orehovo, Chepelare Municipality

Tel.: 03053/ 3490

**Tourism Information Center –
Momchilovtsi**

4750 Momchilovtsi

E-mail; cpst@abv.bg

Tel.: 087 256 407; 03023 2803

Tourism Information Center – Chepelare

4850 Chepelare

Tel: 03051/ 21 10

E-mail: tic@infotel.bg**Tourism Information Center - Zlatograd**

4980 Zlatograd

Tel. 03071 / 21 69

tic_zlatograd@hotmail.com**Tourism Information Center - Russe**

7000 Russe, 61 Alexandrovska Str.

Tel. 082 / 82 47 04

econorth@hotmail.com**Tourism Information Center - Tutrakan**

7600 Tutrakan, 20 Transmarinska Str.

Tel. 0857 / 22 51

tutrakan-tour@top.bg**Tourism Information Center - Hissar**

4180 Hissar, 23 Gurko Str.

Tel. 0337 / 21 41, fax 0337/ 21 41

hissar_infotour@abv.bg**National Information and Advertisement
Center**

1000, Sofia, ? 1 Sveta Sofia Str.

Tel. 02/ 987 97 78, fax 02/ 989 69 39

infctr@mail.mtt.govrn.bg**Municipal Tourism Information Center -
Smolyan**

4700 Smolyan, Mladejki Dom, TIC

Tel. 0301/ 2 50 40, fax 0301/ 2 50 40

**Municipal Tourism – Information Bureau -
Gabrovo**

5300 Gabrovo, ? 2 Vazrajidane Sq.

Tel. 066/ 2 84 83, fax 066/ 2 84 83

**Municipal Tourism – Information Bureau -
Teteven**

5700 Teteven, Sava Mladenov Sq.

Tel. 0678/ 42 17, Fax 0678/ 42 17

**Municipal Tourism – Information Bureau -
Troyan**

5600 Troyan, ? 133 Vassil Levski Str.

Tel. 0670/ 3 50 64, Fax 0670/ 3 50 64

**Municipal Tourism – Information Bureau -
Apriltsi** 5641 Apriltsi, ? 102 V. Levski Str.,
Stara Planina bl.

Tel. 06958/ 32 49, Fax 06958/ 32 49

**Municipal Tourism – Information Bureau -
Tryavna**

5350 Tryavna, ? 22 Angel Kunchev Str.

Tel. 0677/ 22 47, Fax 0677/ 22 47

Tourism Information Center -Balchik

9600 Balchik, 1 Ribarski Sq.

Tel. 0579 / 20 34

Tourism Information Center -Blagoevgrad

2770 Blagoevgrad, Varosha h.c, P.O.Box 454

Tel. 073/ 8 14 58; 367 95, Fax 073/ 3 54 58

ptf@pirin-tourism.bg**Tourism Information Center - Veliko
Turnovo**

5000 Veliko Turnovo, ? 5 Hristo Botev Str.

Tel. 062/ 62 21 48

tic_vt@mobikom.com**Tourism Information Center - Devin**

4800 Devin, ? 5 Osvobojdenie Str.

Tel. 03041/ 41 60, Fax 03041/ 48 56

pmr.devin@mail.bg**Tourism Information Center - Elena**

5070 Elena, 1 Hr. Stanchev Str., Hotel Elena

Tel. 06151/ 37 32; 36 32

eltour@elena.vali.bg

Tourism Information Center - Primorsko
8290 Primorsko, Treti Mart Square
Tel. 0550 / 3 30 76

**Tourism Information Center – Smolyan
Union of the Rhodopean restaurant and
hotel owners**

4700 Smolyan, ? 80 Bulgaria Blvd.
Tel. 0301/ 3 80 85, Fax 0301/ 3 80 85
Rhra@mbox.digsys.bg

Tourism Information Center - Sozopol
8130 Sozopol, Republikanska Str. - Square
Tel. 05514 / 33 36

**Tourism Information Center -
Chernomorets**

8142 Chernomorets, N 6 Sveti Nikola Str.
Tel. 05510 / 27 44

**Tourism Information Center – Shiroka
Luka**

4710 Shiroka Luka
Tel. 03030 / 233
sh.luka@mbox.infotel.bg

**Tourism Information Center – Gotse
Delchev**

2900 Gotse Delchev, ? 2 Tsaritsa Yoanna
Tel. 0751 / 22 086

Tourism Information Center -Kazanlak

6100 Kazanlak, ? 4 Batemberg Str.
Tel. 0431/ 2 49 17, Fax 0431/ 2 49 17

Tourism Information Center -Koprivshitsa

2077 Koprivshitsa, N 6. 20-th April Str.
Tel. 07184/ 21 91, Fax 07184/ 21 91
koprivshitza@hotmail.com

Tourism Information Center - Chepelare

4850 Chepelare, ? 2 ? Murjovska
Tel. 03051 / 21 10
tic@infotel.bg

Tourism Information Center - Bansko

Bansko 2770,
? 2 N. Vaptzarov square

Information Center - Karlovo

4300 Karlovo, 35 Vodopad str.
Tel. 0335 / 53 73
infocentre@mbox.digsys.bg

**Ecological information and Educational
Centre of Nature Association - Ribaritsa.**

5720 Ribaritsa, Teteven mun., 188 G.
Benkovski Str.,
Tsanka Becheva, Tel.: 06902/479

**Central Balkan Information Center –
Kalofer**

4370 Kalofer, Karlovo mun., 3 G. Shopov Str.
Dimitar Marinov – mobile phone 048 762185

**Central Balkan Information Center –
Cherni Ossam**

5620 Cherni Ossam village, Troyan mun.,
Natural History Museum,
Hristo Iliev, Tel.: 06962/371

**Central Balkan Information Center –
Klissura**

4341 Klissura, Karlovo mun., Tchitalishte 20
April 1976,
Lalka Kantimirova, Tel.: 03137/2095

**Rila National Park Visitors Center –
Panichishte**

2650 Sapareva Banya, Kustendil reg.
Strahil Gavriiski, Tel.: 0707/3302

**Nature Protection and Information Center
Eastern Rhodopes – Madjarovo
Information Center**

6400 Madzharovo, 42 A D.Madzharov Str.
03720/280; 304
nicer_bg@yahoo.com

Information Center

Banite village, Smolyan region

4940 Banite village
Kristina Kostova, Tel.: 03025/20 87

**Information Center -Poda Protected Area,
Burgas wetlands**

8000 Burgas, P.O.Box 361
056/85 05 40; 85 05 41

bspbpoda@mobikom.com

Information Center Kaliakra

9650 Kavarna, Dobridch reg, 23 Bulgaria Str.
Galina Nikolova, Tel.: 0570/8 52 64
dobrudja@vega.bg

**Strandja Nature Park Information Center –
Malko Turnovo**

8350 Malko Turnovo, Museum complex
05952/29 98

APPENDIX 3

Branch and Product Associations in Bulgaria*Branch Tourism Associations***Bulgarian Association of Tourism Agencies**

1000 Sofia
 6 Triaditsa Str., .5 floor
 Tel. 02/930 18 27; 930 18 28, Fax 02/930 18 29
bata@mail.orbitel.bg

Bulgarian Tourist Chamber

1040 Sofia
 8 Sveta Sofia Str.
 Tel. 02/987 40 59; 986 51 33, Fax 02/986 51 33

Bulgarian Hotel and Restaurant Owner's Association

1040 Sofia
 2 Sveta Sofia Str.
 Tel. 02/986 42 25; 961 11 69, Fax 02/986 42 25; 961 11 69
ragin_bhra@yahoo.com

*Tourism Product Associations***Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism**

1000 Sofia
 20 B Al. Stamboliiski Blvd.
 Odisseia In
 Tel. 02/989 05 38; 980 32 00, Fax 02/980 32 00
odysseia@omega.bg

Bulgarian Association for Alternative Rural and Ecological Tourism

1113 Sofia
 Akad. Anguel Bonchev Str.
 BAS, Block.3, floor.3, room.320
 Tel. 02/971 34 85; 70 02 40, Fax 02/971 34 85
baret@aster.net

Bulgarian Spa Association

8200 Pomorie
 40 ? P. Yavorov blvd.
 Tel. 0596/58 66; 2 20 04, Fax 0596/2 52 36
mayor@pomonet.bg

Association of the IATA Agencies in Bulgaria

1000 Sofia
 6 Sveta Sofia Str.
 floor 4, room 50
 tel. 02/980 52 55
siab-bg@techno-link.com

BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION FOR ALTERNATIVE TOURISM - BAAT

Sofia 1000, 20 - ? "Al. Stambolijski" Blvd., 2 floor (entrance from "Lavele" str.)

??: +359 2 989 05 38, Fax: +359 2 980 32 00

E-mail : baat@spnet.net www.alternative-tourism.org

The Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT) in 2003! Achievements, Challenges, Possibilities!

The Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT) was established on 31.01.1998 as a national tourist non-government organization. At present BAAT has 73 members: non-government organizations and regional associations in the field of tourism (8), including the Bulgarian hotelier and restaurant association and a number of NGOs, some of which integrate owners of B&B Establishments in rural areas, local tourist councils (2), tour operating companies (14), hoteliers (7), guesthouses (26), companies that produce traditional Bulgarian products, nature parks (4), editors, transportation providers, a monastery, and individuals with business interests in alternative tourism. It is the most progressive public association in the field of tourism in the country.

BAAT participates in the most important events and initiatives related to tourism, regional development and ecology. The association is a member of the *National Tourist Council* and the *Council for Education in Tourism*.

The activity of BAAT was highly estimated in the **American Agency MSI's** report "The Competitive Power of the Bulgarian Tourist Branch" for the Power of Competition Forum.

From its founding date until the present, BAAT has been working on:

Projects

- ✓ **Realized** a project for rural tourism and sustainable development in Strandja Mountains (1998), in co-operation with the Bourgas Association for Regional Development and Association "Mountains and People";
- ✓ **Initiated** the project "The Rhodope craftsman trail" for sustainable development in the Rhodope Mountains. In May 2001 an association with the same name was established;
- ✓ **Conducted** research and completed a data base of guest houses, family hotels and monasteries, situated in mountain and rural areas on a French project with the participation of two French volunteers (2001);
- ✓ With other French volunteers, completed a **selection of the most convenient for accommodation** and receiving tourists among 30 Bulgarian monasteries and published a brochure (2002).
- ✓ **Participated** in the organization of an international campus for studying the Balkan architecture with participants from Bulgaria, Macedonia, Turkey and Greece (September, 2002) as a project of the French organization GEC.
- ✓ **Created** the *Quality Standards Chart* "**Bulgarski Dom**" ("Bulgarian Home") that established consistent guidelines for accommodation in guesthouses, family hotels and other B&B establishments; conducting training courses that help providers raise and maintain quality.
- ✓ **Worked** with Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Program for creating a new Plan for management of Pirin National Park (2001);

Training

- ✓ **Held** 8 training courses in co-operation with Association “**Tetraktys**” (France) during a 3-year project, financed by the French Ministry of Exterior Affairs and the Ministry of Trade & Tourism (1999-2001):
 - 15-day **on route seminar for providers of rural and eco-tourism services** with lecturer *Mr. Yoan Mansfeld* (leading expert from Israel) in the mountain towns Vratsa, Chiprovtsi, Elena, M. Turnovo, Smolyan and Sofia; Mr. Mansfeld focused on Israel’s experience and success in rural tourism.
 - 3 module **course for mountain guides** together with French experts, in co-operation with Association “Mountains and People” – one in France (Briancon) and 3 in Bulgaria – in Malyovitsa mountain center, Vratsa and Rilski ezera hut (Rila lakes hut);
 - 2 summer courses on “**education of family businesses in the field of rural tourism**” with French expert *Mrs. Marisie Moine* – in the towns of Shiroka Luka, M. Turnovo, Jeravna, Gabrovo, Vratsa and Kalofer;
- ✓ **Completed** training courses on “**introducing the profession of a mountain guide**” for the regions of Karlovo and Chiprovtsi (2001) which have very high unemployment rate – a project of Beautiful Bulgaria 3 Program.
- ✓ **Created** training system for mountain guides and realized 2 training courses in Bansko and Ribaritsa for representatives of the national and natural reserves - a project financed by the Bulgarian- Swiss Biodiversity Program (2002); the project was selected to present Bulgaria’s NGOs activities on Rio+10 World conference on sustainable development (Johannesburg, September 2002);
- ✓ **BAAT experts** participated as lecturers in an **educational project on rural tourism** in the Pirin region, initiated by “Zlatna Struma” foundation. BAAT joined forces also in the preparation of 2 booklets for the project: “*What is rural tourism?*” and “*How to develop tourism in the countryside?*” (2002);
- ✓ **Organized** a training course on rural tourism in the villages of Pirin and Goleshovo (Slavyanka mountain). The project was financed by BSBCP (2002);
- ✓ **Organized** a seminar on alternative tourism in the frame of the international exhibition “*Nature, hunting, fishing and tourism*”- Plovdiv (2002);
- ✓ **Trained and consulted** local authorities and accommodation owners on “*How to start our own tourist business?*” in the region of Coastal Dobrudja. Yet another project financed by BSBCP (2003);
- ✓ In collaboration with Consortium FLAG, **BAAT led a research trip** in areas working in the field of the alternative tourism in Bulgaria (2002) and **completed educational courses on marketing and advertisig** in tourism – in Lopushanski monastery, Cherni Ossam, Bansko, Devin and Mogilitsa villages (2003).

Research and consulting:

- ✓ **Organized** the first *National round table* on the problems of tourism in mountains and villages with French experts from government and non-government organizations (1999);
- ✓ **Completed** the first *SWOT analysis* for Bulgarian alternative tourism, which was presented on numerous forums in Bulgaria and abroad (2001);
- ✓ **BAAT** collaborated in the preparation of the National Eco-tourism Strategy (2002);
- ✓ **Participated** in the debates for the Tourism Law (1998,2001,2002), The Law for VAT (2000,2001), SAPARD Program, PHARE – Program “*Culture Tourism*” (EU pre-accessing programs);
- ✓ **Participated** in a working group to prepare the standards for categorizing guest rooms and guest houses in the National Decree for categorizing in tourism (2002).

- ✓ **Consulted** the Ministry of Economy during the preparation process of a booklet about eco-tourism in Bulgaria (2002);

Promotion

- ✓ **Initiated** and supported the printing of two series of 10 posters in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of environment and waters and Bulgarian-Suisse Biodiversity Program (2002);
- ✓ **Organized** 4 promotion trips for representatives from the Bulgarian media and press, under the heading “*The other Bulgaria*”, which were completed in the period September 2001 - January 2002;
- ✓ **BAAT authored and edited** materials about walking tours and national parks in Bulgaria in 2 British guide books Activity series – “*Natural parks in Europe*” and “*Walking in Europe*” (2000);
- ✓ **Gave input** and supported the publication of an information booklet “*The Monastery Route*”, financed by the Ministry of Economy as a part of the National PR campaign;
- ✓ **Published** different materials in leading press media and specialized editions in the field of tourism in Bulgaria and abroad.
- ✓ **Edited** 2 brochures for its activity (a run of 10 000) and calendars (1999 – 2003);
- ✓ **Represented its members on different** national and international tourist fairs and events – “*Vacation*” – 98,’99,’00,’01’02’03 SOFIA; “*Nature, hunting, fishing and tourism*” - 99,’00,’01,’02”- PLOVDIV, “*Tour-expo 2000*” VARNA, Philoxenia – Thessalonica

Forums:

- ✓ **Participated** in the national forum “*Eco-tourism and protected territories - partners for betterment*” October 2002. BAAT members won 6 of the praised conceptions for sustainable development.
- ✓ **Presented** BAAT’s activity on the national fair “*A part of Europe – 2*” 2002.
- ✓ **Took part** in the 5th National conference of the NGOs working in the field of environment and sustainable development – Sofia 2002.
- ✓ **Represented** Bulgaria at the World Mountain Forum in Chambéry (France’98) and Quito (Equador’02);
- ✓ **Participated** in the International Conference “*Bulgaria Dream Area*” by giving a lecture - Sofia (2002);
- ✓ Also as a lecturer **BAAT participated** in the International conference “*Investments in tourism – developing local initiatives*” – Istanbul 2002.

BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL AND ECOLOGICAL TOURISM (BARET)

BARET is a national non-governmental voluntary association (society) that offers services, goods, intellectual products, connected with promoting rural and ecological tourism in Bulgaria, and ensuring conditions for its development. Its purpose is to develop rural and ecological tourism in non-urbanized regions of Bulgaria. In this sense BARET is an organization whose goal is the revival of Bulgarian villages and country regions. The Association has a database of the resource potential for this kind of tourism in different settlements and regions.

BARET was founded on 14 Feb.1995 in the town of Byala Cherkva, Veliko Turnovo region, and was officially registered in June. The president of the association is Dr. Peter Petrov, Ass. Professor. at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The Managing Committee includes 2 mayors, an architect, an engineer, an associate professor of philosophical sciences, researchers and consultants. They are some of the most prominent scientists in the field of ecology, natural sciences and all fields connected with our activity. Members of the organization are village households, municipalities, firms, and intellectuals.

BARET works on national programs for developing tourism and in places that have potential for establishing business contacts with Bulgarian and foreign partners for joint work. It encourages eco-oriented economic and ecological protection activities as well as ecological education. It develops programs for training village households to welcome and accommodate tourists.

BARET's basic activity is the development of a national program "Bulgarian Trails". These are routes in particularly beautiful and attractive sites. This system includes provisions for equipment to allow viewing out-of-reach natural phenomena - gorges, bizarre rock shapes, and waterfalls. The first stages of such sites have been constructed in different parts of the country. They serve as basis for the formation of a new generation of local and regional tourist products. BARET works in close cooperation with the local administrations as well as with the administrations of the national parks and other national reserves, with tourist firms, NGO's and government institutions.

Since its founding, BARET has organized and participated in numerous conferences, seminars and discussions with international participation. In addition, the Association has won and implemented several projects sponsored by various foundations:

- In 1995, a project sponsored by the Regional Ecology Center for Central and Eastern Europe for student ecological education;
- In 1996, a project sponsored by Civil Society Development Foundation "Strengthening of BARET as an organization for rural areas development";
- In 1997-98, a project sponsored by The Democracy Network Program administered by the Institute for Sustainable Communities - USAID , "Awakening the Bulgarian Village through Developing Rural and Ecological Tourism";
- In 1998-99a project sponsored by The British Council The Know How Fund "Development of Rural and Ecological Tourism in Bulgaria - Steps to Success" - a collaborative project between BARET and The Department of Tourism and Sofia University
- In 2001-02 project sponsored by PHARE: "Formation of a regional tourist product - a step to revival and sustainable development of Trun municipality".

BARET is interested in establishing contact with organizations from other countries with similar activity, to work together and exchange experience.

Contact Information for BARET:

Peter Petrov or Alexandra Kisselkova
Blok 3, Room 320, Acad.G.Bontchev St.
Sofia 1113
Bulgaria
Tel. +359/2/979-33-63, tel./fax +359/2/971-34-85
E-mail: baret@aster.net; alkisselkova@yahoo.com

The Bulgarian Tourism Union

The Bulgarian Tourism Union (BTU) was founded on the 27-28 August 1895 on the Vitosha mountain's highest peak – Cherni Vrah, by the initiative of the writer – democrat Aleko Konstantinov – Shtaslivetsa, to protect and develop the many years of tradition in the tourism movement.. Aleko Konstantinov is the patron of the union.

BTU is a voluntary, independent and non-political non-governmental association for social recreation, as well as for sports and tourism, cultural, patriot, nature protection and ecological activities.

The main objective of the BTU is to assist the development of a civil society and democracy in the Republic of Bulgaria, and in the field of the social tourism. BTU creates conditions and offers opportunities and services for:

- Practicing tourism aimed at active recreation;
- Developing and encouraging different types and forms of tourism, mountaineering and other tourism activities;
- Stimulating the orienteering, alpinism, spelaology and other novelties in the sport-tourism area;

The BTU has a total of 324 sites, with 17 418 beds, consisting of 219 chalets with 13 062 beds, 26 shelters with 283 beds, 33 houses with 2394 beds, 33 tourist dormitories with 1296 beds, and 13 camping sites with 383 beds. The first chalet was Skakavitsa, built in 1921, and the last one is Yana, built in 1995. There are 162 members, and approximately 6 000 individuals bought stamps for the 2002 season, making them union members

Since 1971 BTU had developed a radio-telephonic network on its facilities. There are 400 units owned by the union, distributed, and working on two licensed frequencies. Twice a day radio sessions are conducted with the peaks Mussala, Cherni Vrah, Botev, and Zelena Glava. The information exchanged is about the weather, snow cover, wind, and visiting and moving tourist groups. The Mountain Rescue Service also uses this network. In 2001 a Mobile phone business group was opened with 150 members.

APPENDIX 4

*Regional Tourism Associations in Bulgaria***Stara Planina Association**

5300 Gabrovo
4 Raicho Karolev Str., 3 floor
Tel. 066/3 61 90; 2 91 61, Fax 066/3 61 90
silvia@veda.bg

Burgas Association for Ecological and Rural Tourism (BAERT)

8000 Burgas
5 B Tsar Petar Str., 11 floor
Tel. 056/84 25 92, Fax 056/84 07 78
brta@hotmail.com

Varna Tourism Chamber

9000 Varna
25 M. Koloni Str.
Tel. 052/612 809, Fax 052/612 811
vtk@touexpo.bg

Pirin Tourism Forum

2700 Blagoevgrad
P.O.Box 454
Tel.. 073/3 67 95; Fax 073/3 54 58
ptf@pirin-tourism.bg

Burgas Regional Tourism Chamber

Georgi Atanassov
8000 Burgas
32 Lermontov Str.
Tel. 056/84 25 86, Fax 056/84 25 86

Rila Eco-tourism Association

Nikolay Djambazki
Bulgaria, 2000 Samokov, 29 Rilska Malina Str.
Tel: + 359 722 298 40; +359 88 57 31 33; 359 7125 23 61
e-mail: ecotourism_rila@yahoo.co.uk

Central Balkan – Kalofer Eco-tourism Association

Dimitar Marinov
Bulgaria, 4370 Kalofer, 2 Hristo Botev Str.
Tel: + 359 3133 24 05; Fax: +359 3133 25 32
Mobile: + 359 48 762 185

The Rhodopes Regional Tourist Organization

Bulgaria, 4700 Smolyan, 14 Bulgaria Blvd.

Information about the present activities of the

BURGAS ASSOCIATION FOR ECOLOGICAL AND RURAL TOURISM (BAERT)

BAERT was established on 9 June 1995 and registered with Burgas District Court Decision ? 778 /26. 02.1996. The founders of the Association are united by the idea that the protection of natural and cultural heritage over the long term can be done by making it a livelihood resource for people from the rural areas. The objectives of BAERT are to work to increase ecological tourism and the enlarge its territory in the Southeast region of Bulgaria.

In 2001 there were 36 physical and 19 legal entities (4 government institutions, 6 companies and 9 civil associations) in BAERT. The main partners of BAERT are: the Institute for Tourism Management Aleko Konstantinov – Burgas, a Professor at Assen Zlatarov University and are one of BAERT's cofounders; Regional Forestry Board – Burgas; and REI Burgas. Legal entity members with related tasks and objectives are: Bourgas Region Development Organization; Burgas Regional Tourism Chamber; the Strandja Nature Park; Burgas Tourism Council; Burgas Association for Education and Environment; Association for the Protection of the Natural and Historical Heritage – Brashlia; Eco-Club-99; Association Model settlement; Association for the Location, Restoration and Conservation of the Natural and Cultural – Historic Heritage of the village of Gramatikovo; Zvezdets 2000 Association, and Brod Association – Brodilovo village.

BAERT has good cooperation with many municipalities and town halls, but most active are in the municipalities of: Malko Turnovo, Promirsko, Sredets, and Tsarevo and with the municipal representatives in the villages of Brodilovo, Brashlian, Bulgari, Gramatikovo, Zvezdets, Goliamo Bukovo, Kosti, Novo Panicharevo and Yasna Poliana and etc.

Important events and activities:

1996

- Market Survey - Opportunities for the development of ecological tourism in Strandja”, funded y BSBCP
- Workshop: The role of the municipality in the development of the rural tourism – Malko Turnovo – together with the RFE and Strandja Park
- One-week qualification course for experts from parks in the country – Issues of the Ecological tourism in the Tourism college – Burgas – together wit the NP Strandja and the Protected Areas Department of the NFB

1997

- Research on the tourism opportunities in Malko Turnovo municipality– project, funded by the Open Society – Burgas,
- Roundtable – Opportunities for the development of Ecological tourism in Strandja – a discussion during Strandja Park days in Burgas.
- Practical workshop near the village of Bulgari: Opportunities for the organization of ritual and pilgrim tourism
- First attempt for celebrating International Tolerance Day

1998

- Green Tourism Projects, funded by Green Burgas
- Two-year contract with the British Know-How Fund – Sofia for the administration and financial management of three projects carried by BAERT teams, funded by Tourism Initiatives of the Know-How fund for Bulgaria
- Regional workshop and discussion on a topic: The sea and the mountain – opportunities for the integration of the seashore resorts with the mountain and rural tourism
- Practical workshop with a visit on a religious holiday to the monastery in the village of Goliamo Bukovo - Cultural and historical heritage and tourism
- Regional workshop in the Tourism College for the organization of the population for the improvement of the environment
- Together with tour operating companies visit of foreign tourists to the Virgin Mary holiday in the village of Bulgari
- Establishment of the Model Settlement Association

1999

- Regional workshop: The tourism market, planning, ecology – first attempt to implement new rural tourism products
- Implementation of new partner network for the preparation and realization of the regional program for sustainable tourism HEOTI (Hospitality, Environment, Originality, Tolerance, Intellectualization)
- Development and starting of the programs Partnership for sustainable tourism in Strandja as well as Local Programs 2001
- Third stage of “Green Tourism project, funded by Burgas municipality
- Contract with the MOEW for the survey of the tourist flow and the inter-institutional cooperation for the tourism development, related to the management plans of the Silistar and Veleka outfall protected Areas
- Publication of a compendium with articles Hospitality of the Settlement and home
- Green Tourism WEB pages of the Burgas Region Project, funded by Open Society club – Burgas
- Active participation in the Strandja NP Management Plan development

2000

- Establishment and registration of the Brashlian Association for the protection and the preservation of the natural and historical heritage, the Association for the location, restoration and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the village of Gramatikovo, the Zvezdets 2000 Association, and the Brod Association – Brodilovo village
- Workshop in the town of Sungurlare, related to the vine-grower’s day - town holiday.
- Rural tourism workshop and establishment of few more settlement associations from Strandja and Eastern Stara Planina. Through the exchange system with settlement and regional associations, BAERT maintains equal partner relations and gives its input for the development of the structures of the civil society in the southeastern region
- Organization of a contest in the schools – The water – priceless richness of my homeland
- Preparation of a proposal for the declaration of the Ropotamo Nature Park, together with the municipality of Primorsko and Nature Form Association

2001

- Practical workshop in the locality Tsarsko Kladenche: Natural heritage and tourism, with the participation of Brod Association, SFE – Tsarevo and Tsarevo municipality
- Concluding stage of the contest The water – priceless richness of my homeland
- Establishment of a Sustainable Development of the rural Areas Center, together with the National Service for Agricultural Advice and Assen Zlatarov University – Burgas

2002

- Educational Program Natural heritage and Tourism – MOEW Project, Development of the southern seashore regions
- A program for the development of ecological tourism in the villages of Brodilovo, Kosti, Sinemorets - a MOEW Project under a Kingdom of Monaco Program..

Varna Tourism Chamber

Varna Tourism Chamber (VTC) is a regional tourism association, established in 1991. It is a successor to the Territorial Association for Tourism and Recreation. VTC is a voluntary association of branch organizations, physical persons, legal entities from the field of tourism – hotelier, restaurant, tour-operator and tour-agent companies; financial, insurance, manufacturing, transport and commercial companies, related to tourism; educational institutions, providing training in tourism.

At present it has more than 130 members. VTC is a member of the International Council of Tourism Partners (ICTP), the National Tourism Council, and the Bulgarian Tourism Chamber.

The VTC motto is:

TOGETHER WE CAN DO WHAT WE CANNOT DO IF WE ARE APART.

The organization's goals are:

1. To unite, represent, and protect the interests of its members before Bulgarian and international bodies and organization;
2. To support the establishment of conditions for sustainable tourism development;
3. To support the training and qualification increase of tourism staff;
4. To assist the state institutions and NGOs with the development of the legislation for this branch;
5. To participate in the promotion of the Bulgarian tourism product;
6. To contribute to increasing the tourism product quality and to protect customer interests.

The main VTC functions are to:

1. Express and defend statements and proposals for tourism-related legislation documents;
2. Conduct surveys and analyses, provide consultations and expert assessments, and act as a mediator in conflict resolution;
3. Support the development of various types of tourism – vacation, congress, trail, cognitive, rural, hunting, etc.;
4. Organize courses, workshops, trainings, and issue certificates;
5. Issue bulletins and regional brochures, organize the participation of companies in international tourism fairs;
6. Organize PR campaigns and press conferences, use various forms of communication through the mass media;
7. Carry out auxiliary economic activities, related to the main activity and supporting the achievement of its goals;
8. Organize and participate in national and international tourism fairs;
9. Organize collection of information relevant to tourism purposes;
10. Participate in joint international programs and projects with other similar organizations;

The management bodies of the Chamber comprise General Assembly, Managing Board, Control Council, Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Chief Secretary.

PIRIN TOURISM FORUM

The Pirin Tourism Forum, PTF, was founded in 1997 as a result of the three-year Pirin and Rila Eco and Sustainable Tourism Project, or PREST Project, funded by the British Know How Fund from 1994 to 1997. The task of PREST was to establish a broad network of partnerships for sustainable development in the Pirin region, educate and promote the concept of sustainable tourism at as many levels as possible, and lead the way by implementing a number of pilot initiatives and activities. Some of the main achievements of PREST include:

- Training important groups of public actors in a number of themes related to sustainable development of tourism: Nature Conservation, Recreational Use of Forestry, Making the Most of Museums, Crafts, Protected Areas Management, Environmental Education, Tourism Promotion and Marketing, and Customer Care, Small Business Management. There were study visits to the UK and training workshops in Pirin;
- Supporting environmental education activities in the region and establishing Eco Eye Regional Environmental Association;
- Starting a regional crafts database and launching the Made in Pirin Initiative for marketing local souvenir production;
- Accomplishing a detailed tourism inventory of the Pirin region and creating the first regional tourism database and photo-library in Bulgaria.

After the completion of the PREST Project, municipalities from the Pirin region, the Pirin NP and local NGOs founded the Pirin Tourism Forum as a regional tourist board, working for sustainable tourism development in the area. The aim of the consequent project was to strengthen the PTF both as a regional board and as a pilot and innovative organization within Bulgaria.

Main project outcomes:

- Developing the parameters for the National Tourism Information System - SMARTINFO - to be used by the Ministry of Economy and all local and regional tourist organizations in Bulgaria;
- Preparing a Tourism Information Provision Strategy for the Pirin region, including information materials, signing, interpretative panels, information centers and points;
- Publishing a pilot information series 'Explore the Pirin Region' comprising 10 leaflets about the municipalities in the area and a 'Where to Stay' directory of accommodation establishments;
- Presenting the Pirin region at national tourism fairs and publishing a periodical newsletter with detailed information on tourism opportunities in the region;
- Organizing a familiarization trip around the area for Bulgarian tour operators and journalists from the central media;
- Identifying and signing short circular walks near established tourist locations in the region;
- Publishing a promotional package for the Pirin region including 12 leaflets about Pirin municipalities and the Pirin National Park, regional image brochure and leaflet, a folder and a poster;
- Organizing training workshops for guides and representatives of the tourism business in the region and for the improvement of services and standards in local tourism.

The PTF is a member of BAAT – Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism and also the officially recognized by the Ministry of Economy as a regional tourism board of Southwest

Bulgaria. In 1999, the PTF was awarded *The Bulgarian Tourist Organization with the Greatest Contribution to Preserving the National Cultural and Historical Heritage*, by the Bulgarian Minister of Trade and Tourism.

The mission of the PTF is to support sustainable tourism development in the Pirin region, in harmony with the natural, cultural and historical heritage of the area and for the benefit of local communities. In 2000, the organization started its regional program for rural tourism called "28 Rural Week-ends". Up to this point, the first two stages of the program have been completed: an inventory of the tourism potential of all the 256 villages in the Blagoevgrad District, and an evaluation of human resources for the development of rural tourism.

The organization is also working in the sphere of eco tourism and nature protection. Its representatives participate at all stages in the preparation of a Management Plan for the Pirin National Park, funded by the Swiss Government through the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Program. The NP Information System Concept, the Cultural and Historical Heritage Report, the Alternative Tourism Program for Adjacent NP Territories, and the Environmental Education Program for the park were all developed by the PTF. The Ecotrails in Pirin Project of the PTF has been included in the draft Management Plan of the NP.

A representative of the organization was a member of the national working group preparing the National Eco-tourism Strategy at the request of the Ministry of Environment and Waters, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Economy. The same group organized, in October 2002, the First National Eco-tourism Forum, funded by the USAID.

The PTF is trying to share its knowledge and experience nationwide, by providing training and consultation services to other NGOs, local authorities and other institutions. In 2002, it took part in the feasibility studies for a three-year GEF project in Rhodope Mountains, funded by UNDP, preparing the evaluation reports on alternative tourism and traditional crafts as forms of sustainable livelihood.

The Pirin Tourism Forum is the only Bulgarian NGO as a member of the PREPARE Network (Pre-accession Partnership for Rural Europe), whose aim is to enhance sustainable development in candidate countries' rural areas, by establishing Local Action Groups and preparing national and local development programs. Thus, hopefully, all ten countries will be prepared to become equal members of the European family and to implement EU rural policies and programs, including the Leader+ Initiative.

REGIONAL TOURIST ASSOCIATION “STARA PLANINA”

Tryavna – Dryanovo - Gabrovo – Sevlievo - Apriltsi - Troyan – Teven -
Lovech

4, Raicho Karolev Str, 3rd floor 5300 Gabrovo, Bulgaria

Regional Tourist Association “Stara Planina” is a non-governmental non profit organization registered in 1996 by the 5 local tourist associations of Tryavna, Gabrovo, Apriltsi, Troyan and Teven, Gabrovo Chamber of commerce and industry, and Gabrovo municipality. With the growth of its popularity the Association has currently five more members - Municipalities of Tryavna, Dryanovo and Lovech and the Local Tourist Associations in Dryanovo and Sevlievo joined the organization. It has been a model for the establishment of tourism councils around the country.

The Association was established as a part of a Swiss -Bulgarian project for tourism development in the region of Central Bulgaria. Association Stara Planina is one of the organizations represented on the National Tourism Council. It is also a member of the Bulgarian Association for Alternative tourism – BAAT, Bulgarian Association of Travel Agencies – BATA, Bulgarian Hoteliers’ and Restaurateurs’ Association - BHRA and the Association for Partnership and Citizens Activity Support Balkan Assist Stara Planina, implemented since 1994.

MISSION :

Regional Tourist Association Stara Planina stimulates and supports the sustainable development of tourism business and represents the region in the country and abroad as an interesting and attractive place for tourism. RTA consults entrepreneurs in tourist branch, coordinates the activity of Local tourist associations, tourist firms and cultural institutions in the region with the aim to create and promote an attractive tourist product. Association Stara Planina works to increase the quality of tourist services and to create a new image of the region on tourist market.

VISION:

- Regional tourist association “Stara Planina” is an established center for information, consultations and training on problems of sustainable tourist development in the region of Middle Stara Planina.
- Regional tourist association “Stara Planina” has an essential contribution to stimulate the economic growth of the region.
- Regional tourist association “Stara Planina” is a precious partner of local, regional and central authorities, non-governmental organizations in Bulgaria and abroad in the implementation of the projects for regional tourism development.

TRACK RECORD AND ACTION PROGRAM:

- 1998 - Project for biking and hiking tourism under the motto “Hike and Bike on the sun’s path”, which included marking and signalization of hiking and cyclist routes; issuing a tourist map that describes the routes and its signalization. Local tourist offices hire out mountain bikes; there are established offers for this kind of tourism.
- 1997 – 2000 - Publish 2 color brochures that introduce the tourist potential of the region and the diversification of alternative tourist products. RTA issues a brochure on places for accommodation, accompanied by detailed information for the 6 municipalities from the region.
- Since 1999 Association Stara Planina is the initiator and organizes the unique regional contact trade show in the country “The sun’s path”, where there are presentations of opportunities for tourism in each municipality from the region. In 2003 the next contact tradeshow will take place in Sevlievo

- In 2002 RTA has successfully implemented a project for guaranteeing quality of tourist services in the region. This project aims at synchronization of quality standards according to these of European Union.
- Association Stara Planina works actively on specialization of the region as a center of hiking, biking, rural and eco-tourism.

GOALS:

- Work out and implement strategies and projects that stimulate the sustainable tourism development of the region and diversification of tourist supply.
- Enrich the regional tourist product and regular promotion and advertising on internal and foreign tourist market.
- Partnership and interaction with all interested parts for implementation of joint projects in tourism.
- Regular defense of interests of tourist branch from the region
- Attract new members within the Association and expand the range of its territory.
- Create a consulting center that offers high quality services to the members and to external customers.
- Contact secondary and high schools of tourism for offering high quality services, with the aim to improve the qualification of the staff employed in tourism.
- Institutional and financial stability of the association with self financing insurance and expand the diversity of paid services and consults
- Create sustainable partnership relations with foreign partners from related organizations (from European Union and other countries) to learn and apply the positive foreign experience.

The Association works jointly with partners::

- Tourist firms from the region and within the country (hotel and restaurant owners, tourist agencies)
- Cultural institutions, museums, craftsmen
- Tourism secondary schools and Universities from the region and within the country
- Sport clubs
- Individuals, interested in tourism development
- Local, regional and central authorities
- Non governmental organizations from the country and abroad
- Bulgarian and foreign territorial and branch tourist organizations

Services:

- ❑ Seminars to improve the skills and knowledge of members and individuals interested in tourism; exchange experience
- ❑ Contact trade shows for promotion of tourist supply and for support of entrepreneurs in tourism
- ❑ Advertising and promotion of tourist supply in the region; specialized advertising publications, create a web site in Internet –to make regional tourist supply more attractive
- ❑ Consultant assistance – specific knowledge on definite topics; project preparation; lobbying before the authorities
- ❑ Set up new tourist supply- offers, advertising materials, ideas for diversification of the services, contact tourist firms
- ❑ Defense of branch interests in front of the authorities; defense of non loyal competition
- ❑ Information for financing of projects contacts with partner organizations and donors.

MANAGEMENT TEAM

- ❖ **Silvia Hinkova** – Executive director
- ❖ **Stela Kazakova** – Administrative assistant
- ❖ **Ivo Georgiev** – Project assistant

Rila Eco-tourism Association

Bulgaria, 2000 Samokov, 29 Rilska Malina Str.

Tel: + 359 722 298 40; +359 88 57 31 33;

e-mail: ecotourism_rila@yahoo.co.uk

Nikolay Djambazki – Executive Director, Tel: 359 7125 23 61

Vladimir Chapkanski – member of the MB, Tel: + 359 722 2 40 45; +359 48 762 046

The Rila Eco-tourism Association was established in June 2002 as a regional association in the Region of Samokov for the development of sustainable tourism, conservation, maintenance and restoration of the natural resources, and the development of opportunities local population employment, related to the eco-tourism development. The Association was established with active participation of entrepreneurs in the Samokov municipality, and from the villages Beli Isskar, Govedartsi and Mala Tsarkva. The Association is convinced that as partners with Rila National Park and in the name of the public well-being, much can be achieved through the conservation and acquaintance with local landmarks.

In October 2001, together with Rila National Park Directorate, Association members prepared and conducted a special event to open the Park Entrance infrastructure. In the beginning of 2002, public meetings were held in all above-mentioned settlements to inform and raise public awareness on eco-tourism opportunities of the region.

Thanks to joint efforts and the technical assistance, the Association has prepared eco-tourism packages, and prepared an inventory of local resources – catering and lodging establishments, attractions, guides, other services. The Association was a host and offered eco-tourism services to the children from the Anglo- American School in Sofia and to the Bulgaria's Scout Organization.

In alliance with the Central Balkan – Kalofer Eco-tourism Association, The Rila Eco-tourism Association have developed and applied for a World Learning a Project called "Help to the nature and yourself – a future form of Eco-tourism". At present the implementation of this project started, which aims to attract local affiliates from local businesses to eco-tourism and to develop manuals for entrepreneurs – beginners in the field of the eco-tourism.

The Association is developing a strategic plan. One of the most important objectives is the development of partnerships with the Rila NP as a basis for the Association's eco-tourism product.

The Rila Eco-tourism Association is officially registered non-governmental organization with the right to perform commercial activities for the achievement of its goals. The Association has a General Assembly, and the operations and management of the Association is carried by a 7 member Managing Board and by an Executive Director. The organization has no full or part-time employees, and the Association's members carry out its activities on a voluntary basis.

Central Balkan – Kalofer Eco-tourism Association

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The Central Balkan – Kalofer Eco-tourism Association is a non-governmental organization for public beneficial activities, established in June 2002. The main objectives of the organization are the coordination of the interests and the activities, as well as the enhancement of the organization and firms, related to eco-tourism development in Kalofer and its region. The Association also wants to develop partnerships for the conservation of nature of the Central Balkan National Park.

For about year and a half, the Association’s members operated as an Initiative group for Ecotourism, and its members established the Association. In October 2001 together with Central Balkan National Park Directorate, the Initiative group prepared and conducted a special event to celebrate the Park’s 10th anniversary in Kalofer. The Association successfully developed and carried an educational program for pupils from the Anglo-American School in Sofia for acquaintance with the local customs, culture and nature.

The organization had carried an inventory of the local eco-tourism resources in the region of Kalofer and has developed eco-tourism products, which are more and more successful on the market. In August 2002, in partnership with the Municipality of Kalofer, the Hristo Botev National Museum, other local institutions and Phoenix – idea Foundation, Sofia, the Association organized and carried a special promotional event of the one of the most attractive regional symbols – “A Kalofer lace feast “.

The Association continues to work on attracting affiliates. It is working on a project called: Help the nature - help yourself, a future by Eco-tourism, funded by World Learning. The project is carried in association with Rila Eco-tourism Association and it is aimed at working with the local community for the popularization of Eco-tourism and the establishment of special manuals for entrepreneurs beginning in this field.

The association is an entity registered under the Non-governmental Non-for-profit Entities Law and is entitled to commercial activities for the acquisition of its purposes. There is a General Assembly, and operations and management are carried by a 7 member Managing Board and by an Executive Secretary. The organization has no full or part-time employees, and Association members carry out the activities on a voluntary basis.

THE RHODOPES REGIONAL TOURIST ORGANIZATION

Smolyan, Bulgaria.
14 Bulgaria Blvd., Smolyan 4700.

The Rhodopes Regional Tourist Association is a legal non-profit entity, which has been designated to perform its activities for private benefit in compliance with the Legal Non-Profit Entities Act. It is a voluntary association of local tourist businesses, municipalities from the Smolyan region, governmental agencies, and societies functioning in the sphere of culture and education, legal non-profit entities, tourist industry organizations and commercial entities, whose business activities are focused on developing tourism on the local and regional level. The Association's mission is to assist the sustainable development of tourism in the Region of Smolyan, in harmony with the natural, cultural, and historical heritage of the region and for the benefit of the local communities.

The Association works for the attainment of the following objectives:

- sustainable development of tourism in the Region of Smolyan;
- preservation of the natural, cultural, and historical wealth of the region and its adaptation to the needs of tourism;
- creation of alternative jobs for the population in the region and promotion of prerequisites for the development of the local communities by means of sustainable tourist business.

The Association has the following tasks for the attainment of its objectives:

- to coordinate the efforts of all interested parties in the Rhodopes – municipalities, governmental agencies, structures of the civil society, and representatives of the tourist business – for the sustainable development of tourism;
- to work for the enhancement of public awareness and the involvement of society in solving the issues related to the sustainable development of tourism, in harmony with the natural, cultural, and historical heritage of the region;
- to assist the formation, pursuit, and accomplishment of local and regional policies for sustainable tourist development as part and parcel of the national policy;
- to secure the unity and coordination of the intentions and actions of tourist entities in the region upon the formation and development of a comprehensive tourist product in line with the principles of sustainable development;
- to coordinate the information back-up and marketing of the regional tourist product, as well as the promotion of the Rhodopes as a locality developing sustainable tourism;
- to support the establishment and maintenance of standards in the supply of tourist services on the territory of the Rhodopes.

The Association will be pursuing the following lines of business:

With respect to tourist resources:

- registration, effective and efficient utilization of all resources conducive to the sustainable development of tourism in the Rhodopes;
- preservation, development, efficient and effective utilization of the region's natural resources;
- preservation, advertisement, efficient and effective utilization of the anthropology-related resources of the region: historical heritage, cultural wealth, way of life and traditions.

With respect to the tourist product:

- development of the material base and infrastructure of tourism;
- coordination of efforts in the area of elaboration and implementation of regional projects and investment programs connected with the sustainable development of tourism;
- assistance for raising the quality of tourist services in the region;
- assistance for the development of the various components of the tourist product both on the local and regional level;
- assistance in the area of education and training of the personnel employed in the tourist sector, and implementation of up-to-date technologies and know-how in all tourist activities.

With respect to the supply of tourist services:

- maintenance of a regional tourist data-base and a photo library;
- elaboration and implementation of regional programs for information servicing and marketing of the tourist product;
- public relations: media policy and public events;
- motivation activities for the better incorporation of professional ethics in the activity of tourist entities.

Members of the Association are local tourist associations, municipalities from the Region of Smolyan, governmental agencies, culture- and education-oriented institutions, legal non-profit entities, tourist branch organizations and business entities, as well as other physical and legal persons, the line of business of which is the development of tourism on the local and regional level, and who share the ideas laid down in the Articles of Association. Each member of the Association pays an initial membership fee and annual membership fee in the amount stipulated by the General Assembly.

The governing bodies of the Association are General Assembly; Board of Directors; Executive Director; Controlling Council. The General Assembly consists of all members of the Association. The Board of Directors consists of five members of the Association who are elected by the General Assembly for a three-year term of office. The Chairperson of the Board of Directors is elected by the General Assembly.

APPENDIX 5

<i>List of National and Regional Municipal Associations</i>		
Association of the Bulgarian Black Sea Municipalities	Mariana Kuncheva, Executive director	9000 Varna, P.O.Box 161, office: 4 Preslav str.
Association of the Rhodopean Municipalities	Zlatka Nikolova, Executive director	4700 Smolyan, 14 Bulgaria Blvd., Business Center, office 412/13, P.O. Box 100
Association of the Danubean Municipalities Danube	Petar Dulev, Executive Director	5930 Belene, 23 Bulgaria Sq., fl. 8, office 805, P.O.Box. 14
Regional Municipal Association Maritsa	Raina Yovcheva, Executive Director	6300 Haskovo, 1 Hristo Botev Str., Business Center, office 319
Regional Municipal Association Stara Planina	Mariela Petrova, Executive Director	5300 Gabrovo, 4 Raicho Karolev Str.
Regional Municipal Association Trakia	Ivan Varliakov, Executive Director	6000 Stara Zagora, 102 Tsar Simeon Veliki Blvd., fl.2
Regional Municipal Association Yantra	Mariela Tsoneva	5000 Veliko Turnovo, Maika Bulgaria Sq. 2
National Municipal Secretaries in the Republic of Bulgaria Association	Vassil Pancharov, Executive Director	5300 Gabrovo, 1 Vazrajidane Sq.
National Association of Municipalities	Ginka Chavdarova Director	1000 Sofia, 16-20 Alabin Str.
FLGR – Foundation for Local Government Reform	Andrey Goranov Grants Officer	1504 Sofia, 22-A San Stefano Str.
Legal Initiative for Local Self-Governance National Association	Eva Radeva, Executive Director	1000 Sofia, 4 , 11 th of August Str., floor 3
Municipal Council Chairmen's Association	Krassimir Kossev, Executive Director	8230 Nessebar, 10 Edelvais Str.
South-West Municipalities Association	Lubitsa Tomova, Executive Director	2700 Blagoevgrad, 23 Todor Alexandrov str., office 32
Association of the South and Central Region Municipalities – Hebar	Stoilka Stoyanova	4000 Plovdiv ? 1 Centralen sq. fl. 2,
Regional Municipal Association of North-West Balkans – for tourism development	Plamen Keranov	Berkovitsa municipality

APPENDIX 6

The Links of Eco-tourism with Mass Tourism Market

1. **Poda Nature Conservation Center of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds** welcomes tourists from Golden Sands, Sozopol, Primorsko, and Burgas. The duration of the visit is 40 – 50 minutes. There are lectures on the biodiversity of Poda while visitors observe wild birds from the Center's terrace. In 2002 the Center had 20 500 visitors /mass tourist/.
2. **Eastern Rhodopes Conservation Center of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds** welcomes organized groups from the whole country, foreign groups, naturalists, students, etc. The duration of a visit could be from 20 min. to several hours. It includes lectures, introduction to the local rare birds (vultures, eagles), observation from a special point. Maintains accommodation and food services.
3. **Atanssovsko Lake Birdwatching Shelter.** This is still not well developed, publicity is poor, and there are no organized visits, except individual tourist visits.
4. **Ropotamo River Boat Ride.** Duration 40- 60 minutes with a short overview. Two companies have been licensed by the MOEW and regional REIW to offer this service. There is no precise data about the number of visitors, but estimates show there are approximately 10 000 visitors per month in the summer season.
5. **Veleka River Boat Ride.** Going up the estuary 9 km inland. Two companies have been licensed by the MOEW and regional REIW to offer this service. Unlike at Ropotamo, the Veleka river product is still being developed with considerably fewer visits, and no organized visits.
6. **Off-Road Photo-safari in Ropotamo Reserve.** Duration – 3 hours. Panoramic views with a short presentation on the biodiversity of Strandja, observation of the water lilies, and photos.
7. **Strandja Nature Park.** A visit to the Brashlian village architectural reserve. Duration of the visit, about 2 hours. Organized tourist groups come from Primorsko, Duni, and Sozopol. They visit the St. Dimitar church, the religious school, the ethnographic exhibit, park's information desk. They also participate in a traditional outdoor folklore-dance event and enjoy the hospitality of Strandja homes. Last year there were 1 500 visitors. This season Brashlian enjoys an increasing interest, even exceeding its capacity.
8. **Strandja Nature Park.** A family trip to the village of Gramatikovo. Duration about 3 hours. Organized groups come from Primorsko, Duni, and Sozopol. They visit the forest exhibition with a short presentation on the park's biodiversity. Children are invited to creatively use the natural materials and there is a donkey cart trip, a visit to the local church, short presentation of the Easter Swing, short walk, followed by a picnic with traditional meals – groats pastry, and ayryan (cold diluted yogurt). There is

a folklore program and the guests are taught traditional dances, and have the opportunity to beat traditional Strandja drum.

9. **Strandja Nature Park.** Off-road Safari. Duration – 8 hours. Organized groups come from Sunny Beach, Nessebar, and Ravda. They visit Mladejko village, have a short walk to the spring of the Mladejka river, a cave and lunch in the village. They also visit the bars near the village of Stoilovo, the village of Brashlian, the ethnographic exhibit, the religious school and a typical Strandja house; and have an outdoor meal in a natural environment, combined with a air-gun shooting. Last year there were 2 000 visitors.
10. **Kozicheni village.** There is a visit to an ostrich farm, a donkey cart ride, and an outdoor meal. Organized groups come from Sunny beach, Nessebar, Ravda, and Pomorie.
11. **Kozicheni village** - visitors go to a sheep pen on horses; the Shepherd shows how to milk the animals, visitors are welcome to taste fresh salted cheese; and have a folklore restaurant meal in the settlement. The tourists participate in the reproduction of local customs.
12. **Kozicheni village** – visit to the wool-combing facility, the local church, and participation in local customs reproduction.
13. Similar programs are offered in the villages of **Kamenar, Prosenik, Giliovtsi, Bata and Melovo.**
14. **Tankovo village.** A visit to the Moon Valley reserve – 30 decares of orchard and vegetable gardens, where tourist collect their own fruits and vegetables; fishing. /located near Sunny Beach/.
15. **Kaliakra Nature Conservation Center.** Unlike Poda, there are no organized visits. The Center offers a brief presentation of the park and the adjacent territories with many environmental videos. The center had about 400 visitors between May and June this year.
16. **Protected area “Pobiti kamani” (Fossil Forest)** - This year there were 5 000 visitors. This is a part of a package /village houses visits/.
17. **Aladja monastery.** There were about 25 000 visitors form the Golden Sands, Albena, St. Konstantin, and Varna.
18. **Zlatni Piassatsi Nature Park.** The Zlatni Piassasti (Golden Sands) Nature Park center offers the following additional services:
 - Guides;
 - Two half-day programs - “Following the steps of the accent monks” and “In the Jays nest”;
 - Photo and ordinary safari;
 - “Forest fest” – entertainment product with folklore and modern program, over 5,000 visits annually.

Excluding the weekend tourism, 30 000 tourists visit the Park annually; of these 25,000 visit Aladja Monastery (50% foreigners), 8,000 hike the tourist trails (80% foreigners). The children's trail is visited by 1,500 children each year.

- 19. Prilep village** – Off-road. Organized tourists come from Golden Sands, Albena, St. Konstantin, and Varna.
- 20. Klementovo village** - a visit to a village house, short introduction to rakia distilling (Bulgarian grape brandy), a donkey cart ride, photo-safari. Organized groups come from Golden Sands, Albena, St. Konstantin, and Varna.
- 21. Scuba Diving Tourism and Relict 2002 Eco-Club** – offers underwater photography, archeology, boat riding. /Varna/
- 22. A visit to a local homestead** – The tourists participate in a folklore event, visit ethnographic exhibits, outdoor agricultural museum and a restaurant.
- 23. Extreme Tours** – yachting, sailing, cave diving, trail hikes, fortress wall, and cliff climbing. Organized tourists come from the Golden Sands, Albena, and Varna.
- 24. A visit to the wine museum in Sungurlare**. Wine tasting and a visit to a traditional village house.

Statistics show that about 2/3 of the tourists in May, June, July, August, September and October participate in the events they were offered. In July and August about 50 % of the tourists take tours. In the spring and autumn months senior tourists are more common and they are more interested in cognitive tours, while summer tourists care mostly about the sun and little else.