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STUDENT EXCHANGE

**BELASITSA – AN INSIGHT TO NATURE PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

*A TRIP TO BULGARIA, GREECE AND FYR MACEDONIA*

1-4 November 2013



Photo: P. Rzerzycha

**This memo is about Registration for the Student Exchange 1-4 November 2013,  
Belasitsa Nature Park, Bulgaria, Lake Kerkinis National Park, Greece, Strumica region, FYR Macedonia  
Please register before October 15th!**

## **Invitation**

### STUDENT EXCHANGE

## **BELASITSA – AN INSIGHT TO NATURE PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

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Let's learn by experiencing!

We would like to announce a Student Exchange in the frame of the project "Belasitsa Beyond Borders – Transboundary Cooperation along the Balkan Green Belt".

The exchange is open for students from Bulgaria, Greece and FYR Macedonia and will take place on the territory of Belasitsa Nature Park, Bulgaria, Lake Kerkini National Park, Greece and the region of Strumica, FYR Macedonia.

### **Event information**

The four day exchange will take place in three countries offering the participants a chance to experience and explore Belasitsa in all of them. The students will get acquainted with the nature values of the area and get an insight into the administration responsibilities of Belasitsa Nature Park and Lake Kerkini National Park. Presentations on biodiversity protection, nature protected areas management, and tourism opportunities in the region will contribute to the experience.

During the tour to Belasitsa, the students will get to know the potential of the region as an ecotourism destination. In F.Y.R. Macedonia, NGOs and municipalities will present their work related to sustainable tourism development.

The participants will have the chance to demonstrate their vision for the future of the region by developing concrete tourism product examples connected with particular sites or services in Belasitsa area.

A total of 21 students will take place in the event and three of them will be chosen and provided with a grant in order to prepare a thesis with relevance to Belasitsa (e.g. tourism development, sustainable development and nature conservation, joint transboundary management of Belasitsa etc.).

### **Terms and conditions of participation:**

- All participants must be full time university students in their final or pre-final year of studies (Bachelor or Master).
- All participants must be students who study nature or economic sciences (biology, ecology, environmental protection, geography, tourism, tourism marketing, sustainable regional development, economy, management etc.).
- All participants must be between 18 and 30 years of age.
- All participants must come from Bulgaria, Greece or FYR Macedonia.
- Work language – English.
- Accommodation – provided by the organizers. Shared rooms in guest houses or small hotels.
- Food – provided by the organizers.
- Necessary equipment – comfortable walking boots, waterproof jacket and trousers, warm clothes, personal belongings, binoculars.
- Participation fee – 30 euro per person.
- Travel costs – the participants cover their own travel cost to the starting point (the town of Petrich).

- Maximum number of participants – 21 people. Seven per each country – Bulgaria, Greece and FYR Macedonia.
- The exchange starts on 1 November 2103 and finishes on 4 November 2103. Travel to the starting point (the town of Petrich) is responsibility of the participants.

### **Belasitsa & Kerkini region**

Belasitsa Mountain is divided among three countries – Bulgaria, Greece and FYR of Macedonia. Here at Tumba Peak (1880 m a.s.l.), the three borders come together.

The main mountain ridge is narrow and covered in pastures and sub-Alpine shrubs. The slopes are steep and forested, cut through by deep gorges, swift-flowing rivers and small but beautiful waterfalls. The highest point of the mountain is Radomir Peak with altitude of 2029 m a.s.l.

For the protection of the unique nature of the mountain, the newest Bulgarian nature park was established in 2007 – Belasitsa Nature Park. The protected area covers a territory of 11 732,43 ha and is home of century old beach and chestnut forests, as well as a number of protected rare and endangered plant and animal species. Here the visitor can observe the rare and gorgeous Albanian lily, the European yew – a survivor from the ice age, the mysterious White-backed woodpecker and many others.

Apart from biodiversity protection, the park aims at the development of nature friendly sustainable tourism. The protected area is criss-crossed by a network of hiking trails which offer access to the unique nature of the mountain.

Lake Kerkini is one of the most important wetlands in Greece. The Lake Kerkini National Park was established in the autumn of 2006 with the aim of protecting and preserving the wider area of Kerkini wetland. The total area under protection is about 83,100 hectares. Kerkini wetland, which is the central part of the National Park, is one of the 10 Greek Wetlands of International Importance (also a Ramsar Wetland). The wetland is surrounded by the mountains of Mavrovouni (Kroussia) and Kerkini (Belasitsa), the latter being the natural border between Greece and Bulgaria. The lake of Kerkini was created in 1932 with the construction of a dam on the river Strymonas near Lithotopos Village and the creation of dikes on the east and west side. The biodiversity of the area is very rich. Three hundred bird species have been observed at the lake and the surrounding mountains. Apart from birds, other animal species are also important, such as amphibians (11 species), reptiles (26 species), mammals (>58 species), fish (30 species). Only the invertebrates are more than 4700. More than 1200 species of plants are known from the area, including 16 species of orchids, while the wetland flora is dominated by water lilies, European watercress, duckweeds, Water-chestnut, Floating fern etc., and – on the mountains – by oaks, beeches, lime trees, firs, hornbeams etc.

### **For registration & more information**

Vladimir Milushev (Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation, Bulgaria)

e-mail: [vladimir.milushev@biodiversity.bg](mailto:vladimir.milushev@biodiversity.bg)

mobile: +359 898 70 09 61

The present International Student Exchange is organized in the frame of the project “Belasitsa Beyond Borders – Transboundary Cooperation along the Balkan Green Belt” which is jointly implemented by the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation – Branch Belasitsa (Bulgaria), EuroNatur (Germany), Belasitsa Nature Park Directorate at the Executive Forestry Agency (Bulgaria), Management Authority of Lake Kerkini (Greece) and Environmental Association Planetum – Strumica (FYR Macedonia).

The project is co-financed by the German Federal Environmental Foundation (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, DBU) – 50% and the project partners – 50%.