

EOS CODE

Launching Conference

23 January 2012, Athens, Greece

**Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,**

Let me firstly as a Secretary General of Association of Bulgarian Tour operators and Travel Agents convey ABTTA' sincere gratitude to all project partners:

- to the national associations of Croatia, Italy and Poland and especially of Greece
- the project' coordinator, for the privilege to *lay together the foundations for the dawn of a new era of travelling, where sustainability will be an important element of travel package,*
- to the University of Padova and the Research Institute for Tourism of Athens, for the chance of partnering with some of the most prestigious Europe's knowledge makers in the field of tourism,
- to ECTAA, the most respected professional organization in tourism for the valuable guidance while running the remarkable idea of EOS CODE.

Nowadays the Bulgarian tourism faces the biggest challenge in its recent 25 years history - to become responsible.

ABTTA share understanding that the future of the Bulgarian tourism lays not in the erection of megalomaniac hotels neither in the development of golf courses. The preserved nature of Bulgaria possess great potential to ensure thrilling and unconventional tourism experience with high informative value and it is out of doubt that namely the inexhaustible cultural and historical Bulgarian heritage attract tourists to Bulgaria.

Yet certain shortcomings in the national marketing policy along with the poor synergy between the main tourism stakeholders - business, professional organizations and governmental institutions impede the progress of the responsible tourism.

In this spirit participation in EOS CODE came as a natural extension of ABTTA' activities to foster the development of corporate environmental and social responsibility culture and is a consistent step to help the tourism industry to embrace responsible business behaviour and thus - to encrease the Bulgarian tourism competitiveness.

Although encouraging recent improvement of the image of the responsible tourism, adoption of sustainable practices by the industry in Bulgaria is still limited. As per the study conducted during the project, only 25% of the inquired Bulgarian travel agencies have declared involvement in activities related to the sustainability, two third of them working in B2C sector.

The findings from the first research stage of the EOS CODE emphasize on the importance to raise the commitment towards the sustainable tourism by all the actors in the tourism supply chain. For this reason the good practices gathered from Bulgaria cover different fields of the travel and tourism business activities – tour operators', auxiliary tourist services, thematic routes, tourist alliances, educational centers, etc. The main selection criteria for all presented examples, beside their close connection with the sustainability principles, is the possibility **to be easily duplicated by the interested business sector.**

Next action in ABTTA' promotion activity of EOS CODE is addressed to the customers. In order to increase tourists' awareness about the tourism sustainability **a new section on responsible traveling will be added in ABTTA web site** providing information about responsible tour operators and sustainable tourism products.

ABTTA is positive that the engagement of the Government with formal policies that back the responsible management of the tourism resources and implement incentive mechanisms to stimulate corporate environmental and social responsibility can give a powerful push to the development of sustainable tourism. In collaboration with other branch organizations ABTTA will exploit all the existing possibilities in this field in order **to raise general public sensitivity towards the sustainable tourism and further to promote EOS CODE.**

One of the Bulgarian good practices presented in the CODE turns to be a meeting point of ABTTA vision on the issues related to the environmental protection, sustainable business behavior and governmental role in promoting corporate responsibility. The said practice will be used as another **distribution channel of EOS CODE in Bulgaria.**

And before requesting Mr. Mihail Mihov, representative of the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism - affiliated member of ABTTA to present their *Spring Festival of responsible tourism, nature and healthy living, GREEN DAYS* **I am pleased to pass ABTTA invitation for joint participation of EOS CODE' partners in the specialized exhibition in Sofia in April 2012.**

Besides the free possibility to exhibit themselves as environment and sustainability oriented tourism associations, EOS partners are invited also to take part in the *International Conference on Responsible Tourism* to be held during the festival and to get use of other numerous networking opportunities the event provides for presentation of ecologically and socially responsible business.