

## **“Belasitsa Beyond Borders”**

### **Cross-border cooperation along the Balkan Green Belt**

Mount Belasitsa (Kerkini) lies in the triangle of the borders between Bulgaria, Greece and FYROM at the core of the Balkan Green Belt. It is characterized from unique biodiversity of sub-Mediterranean, Mediterranean and mountainous ecosystems. For this reason, it has been declared protected area with different protection regimes in Bulgaria and Greece. In FYROM there is no protection legislative status.

Mount Belasitsa is an area of outstanding and special ecological value. Recently, however, several cases of illegal activities have been recorded. Activities that threaten the balance of the ecosystem such as intensive illegal logging, construction of small hydropower plants in habitats of rare species of *Platanus orientalis*. For this reason, the sustainable use of natural resources in the cross-border area of Belasitsa is highly important for the integration of nature protection into the development ensuring good quality of life for people who live and work in this area.

So, seeking the sustainable development of the region, this project aims to the cross-border cooperation. It focuses on ecological, social and economic aspects of the region. Its main effort is to inform the general public about the natural values of the mountain and the possibilities offered eg for ecotourism.

The project aims to:

- Environmental education
- Development and promotion of ecotourism offers

Specifically, the actions that are implemented:

- Youth Camps for young people of 18 years and more from the three countries.
- Exchange students. Field trip for students in the Bulgarian side of the mountain and in Lake Kerkini National Park.
- Seminars for ecotourism professionals of the area (behavior, services, promotion of local products, etc.)
- Tour Guides Training
- Production of information material
- Information boards at key points of the area
- A website creation
- Hiking to the top of the highest mountain Radomir
- Creating an interpretive trail in the side of the mountain that belongs to FYROM
- Photo competition and exhibition
- Excursion to the area for travel agents
- International conference

The partners of the project are the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation - Branch Belasitsa, the EuroNatur, the Belasitsa Nature Park Directorate (Bulgaria), Lake Kerkini Management Authority and the EA Planetum - Strumica (FYR Macedonia).