Cross-Border Co-operation between Bulgaria and Turkey (Cultural and Historical Heritage Diversity – Opportunities for Tourism)

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Abstract

Cross-border co-operation aims at strengthening relations between the border regions of Bulgaria and Turkey by promoting joint activities for achieving economic and social development and protection of the environment. The common cultural heritage on the territory of the Border Region can help in realising joint cross-border programmes in the field of scientific research, excavation, preservation, rehabilitation and exploitation of antique settlements for the benefit of local communities and external visitors. There already are exchanges across the border, partly led by public institutions, partly by other associations. These contacts can however be intensified thus creating a basis for a more active cross-border co-operation.

Key words: Tourism, cultural heritage, historical heritage, cross-border co-operation

Cross-border co-operation aims at strengthening relations between the border regions of Bulgaria and Turkey by promoting joint activities for achieving economic and social development and for overcoming problems deriving from the specific conditions of these regions, in a manner compatible with the protection of the environment. (Bulgaria-Turkey CBC 2004-2006) (Figure 1). The investigate region between these two countries comprises all the Bulgarian districts and Turkish provinces along the border. It comprises the districts of Burgas, Yambol and Haskovo in Bulgaria and the provinces of Edirne and Kırklareli in Turkey. Tourism is travel for recreation. On other hand tourism is travel for leisure and for business purposes. Last, but not least tourism is a travel for learning.

The tourist industry is very important for the economic development of the cross-border region. There are two parts with more develop tourist sector. Te first is the North East part of the Region (in Bulgaria) and the second one is Edirne (Turkey). On the Bulgarian Black Sea there are towns and villages, which are very attractive, but they are not very attractive outside the summer months. The main attractions of city of Edirne are: its historical past, numerous monuments and tradition. Tourism is one of the main economic opportunities for this region. Today it is not well developed. The district of Bugras is the only exception. There are opportunities for the other parts to develop alternative forms of tourism - cultural, historical and ecotourism. The nex sections describes the conditions for that.

The Black Sea coastal areas and beaches with fine golden sand together with thermal mineral springs provide favourable conditions for relaxation and recreation and for the development
of sea and coastal tourism. In Bulgaria the most developed part for tourism is the district of Burgas. There are big seaside resorts such as “Sunny Beach”, “Elenite” and “Dyuni”. They are organised to receive mass tourism as well as the coastal towns and villages of Nesebar, Sozopol, Pomorie, Primorsko, Ravda and St. Vlas. All of them are connected by a panoramic seaside road. Most of the tour operators here are family firms. White and soft sands and warm waters from June to September go together with a marvellous nature and hundreds of places of interest along the coast, ranging from old pagan sanctuaries to remains of ancient Roman and Greek civilisations, and authentic cultural and historical monuments of the Bulgarian state. Archaeological, architectural and historic monuments in the region are favourable for development of cultural tourism.

The Old Nesebar is a unique monument of culture and is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In the Strandzha Mountains can be seen some of the most ancient structures made by humans – the dolmens. Thracian mounds, ancient Greek poleis, remains of ancient and medieval fortresses have been found here. The region is widely known for its vine-growing and wine production traditions. The wines of Sungurlare are very famous. The dense riparian forests with overgrowth along the rivers of Ropotamo and Veleka, the beauty of the rivers of Dyavolska and Fakiiska, the diverse wildlife in the Strandzha and Sakar Mountains and the nature reserves are a prerequisite for the development of ecotourism and hunting. Apart from the Silkosia, the oldest reserve in Bulgaria (1933), here one can visit the Ropotamo and Strandzha National Parks, the Duni (the Dunes) and Vodnite Lilii (the White Lilies) reserves, the fiords and the seals cave on Maslen Nos Cape and other sites. One can immerse in the unique atmosphere created by the seaside houses from the National Revival period in Nesebar and Sozopol and the preserved samples of the Strandzha house in the villages of Fakia, Kasti, Brashlyan, Bulgari etc. The region still preserves in their purest form the fire-dances on live coals, which are performed on the holidays of the Saints Constantine and Helena.

The territory of Haskovo district includes the southwestern ridges of the Sakar Mountains and the northernmost spurs of the eastern Rhodopes. The rivers that flow through the area are the Maritza, the Arda and the Sazliika. There are hot mineral water springs in the balneological resorts of Mineralni Bani. Mineralni bani is a national balneotherapy centre, with natural attractions and 14 mineral springs. There are mineral springs in Merichleri, Simeonovgrad and Dolno Botevo village, too. It has good prospects for attracting foreign investments, being suitable for the development of balneotherapy, rural and ecological tourism. As many as 100 Thracian mounds were excavated in the region – near the villages of Mezek (the 4th century BC), Alexandrovo, Simeonovgrad and on the land of the villages of Madzharovo, Voivodino, Gorski Izvor, Tatarevo etc. In the district of Haskovo, traces of the historical past like the remains of a Roman villa at Armyra near Ivaylovgrad and the mediaeval fortress in Mezek can help promoting tourism. The municipalities of Madjarovo, Stambolovo, Ivaylovgrad and Lyubimetz, along the river valley of Dolna Arda, have good potential for rural, ecological tourism and water sports.

In Yambol district there are good conditions for developing of ecotourism. In the nature reserves of Gorna Topchiya, Dolna Topchiya and Balabana, and in the protected areas of the Ormana and the Swamp (Blatoto) there are many rare animal and herbaceous species. The valley of the Tundzha River offers good conditions for hunting tourism, and boat sightseeing cruises in picturesque areas amidst the lush vegetation. There are more than 270 ancient villages and approximately 1000 burial mounds in the region. Several important archaeological landmarks are present in the district as well as remains of Thracian and Roman settlements (Kabyle and Dianopolis). There are good conditions for developing of cultural and
historical tourism. In Yambol district, within the area of Sakar Mountains, there is the highest concentration of megaliths and dolmens.

Tourism is not highly developed in the Turkish part of the Region. The coastal areas on both the Aegean and Black Seas are not well known and developed. Many of natural, archaeological and cultural sites are interesting. They have good tourism potential, but there is no good advertising. Edirne is the most visited place on this side of the Border Region. The main problem is that the tourists are transit. They are coming for one day excursions from Istanbul. The most interesting tourism resources are: Selimiye Mosque, Arasta, Old Mosque (Eski Cami), Üç Şerefeli (Three Minaret) Mosque, the last tower of Edirne’s city walls (Makedonya Kulesi “Macedonian Tower”), Saraçlar Caddesi (Street), Maarif Caddesi, historical wooden houses, Jewish Synagogue, Muradiye Mosque, Beyazit Complex, Medical Museum, Balkan Wars Martyrdom, Museum of Archeology, Museum of Islamic Arts, Justice Court (Adalet Kasrı), Kırkpınar Pasture, Old Bridges, Karaağaç, historical building of Presidency of Trakya University, Lausanne Monument etc. In the Edirne province, there are 29 resorts, with a total of 2,037 beds, and one camping site. Outside the biggest city, there are other beautiful sites that are of high archaeological and historical interest, but they are not advertised well.

Kırklareli province has a natural beauty. It offers many possibilities for sea and cultural tourism. The main tourism resources of city of Kırklareli are: Hizirbey complex (Hizirbey mosque, Hizirbay bath, Arasta) and Dupnica cave. On the Black Sea coast the lake of Saka, the Longoz forest, Kastros, Kiyiköy and its surroundings, Iğneada and its neighbourhood have beautiful natural features.

There are good opportunities for developing of different kinds of tourism. The cultural and historical heritage of the region is one of the possibilities. They need good advertising and common travel agencies.

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