



Press Release

**How to foster sustainable tourism in the regions:
Regions work concretely together in Peer REViews for Sustainable Eco-Regions
Via Europe (PRESERVE)**

Alba (RO), 17 March 2010.

Today, almost 200 delegates gathered in Alba County (RO) to discuss tourism in the regions and the role played by the sector in Europe's economic and social development. Tourism is an essential element in regional economies: it represents 4% of the European Union GDP and 12% of European workforce, and counts two millions companies. With the recession, tourism habits are changing and tourism needs to adapt to this new environment.

In this context, it is therefore even more important for tourism to remain sustainable. This is why the Assembly of European Regions (AER), together with 13 partner regions, launched the Peer REViews for Sustainable Eco-Regions Via Europe, the so-called PRESERVE project, under INTERREG IVC. Through this project, regional policymakers are able to develop a work plan to apply recommendations and improve their cultural heritage and landscape policies by using common evaluation methodologies, exchange of best practice and audits from other regional experts (Peer Reviews).

After one and a half year of activity, the time has come to take stock of the two first PRESERVE peer reviews which took place in 2009, in Örebro in Sweden and in Banska Bystrica in Slovakia. Members of the Preserve Steering Committee discussed the lessons learned and gave directions on how to optimise the project. The first conclusion was the fact that these peer reviews are clearly beneficial and instructive for both sides, they are truly a win-win exchange between interviewees and peers. Participants also highlighted the importance of an excellent advance preparation. **Agnes Frank**, Project Manager for territorial cooperation of the Land Steiermark (A), noticed that: *"A big part of the work needs to be done much in advance, and the host regions have to express their expectations to the peers. Furthermore, peer reviews should target both the public and private sectors in order to get a global vision of the region's needs and potential."* she concluded.

The participants unanimously agreed on the usefulness of this project which allows in depth exchanges of experiences and good practices. Four PRESERVE peer reviews will be organised this year, in Eszak Alföld (Hungary), Avila (Spain), Kärnten (Austria) and Sterea Ellada (Greece).

“Our County, Alba, looks forward to taking part in this peer review exercise. Alba will work together with the partner regions, and we are certainly going to learn much from each other. I am convinced that all participants at today’s conference in my region will go home with some new ideas and tools on how to develop their tourism in order to make it even more sustainable, for the benefit of our citizens.” stated **Ion DumitreI**, President of Alba County Council.

Background

PRESERVE is part of INTERREG IVC instrument - With AER as lead partner, 13 partner regions from 11 countries are working together over 3 years to improve the effectiveness of regional development policies, specifically focusing upon cultural heritage and landscape policies as key factors in economic development.

Partners: AER (lead), Abruzzo (I), Alba (RO), Alytus (LT), Avila (E), Banska Bystrica (SK), Kärnten (A), Észak-Alföld (H), Fyn (DK), Jönköping (S), Örebro (S), Streea Ellada (GR), Steiermark (A), Toscana (I).



*The **Assembly of European Regions (AER)** is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.*

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