

**BUSINESS FORUM FOR TOURISM UNDER THE INNOBUS PROJECT STIMULATES
ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE CROSS-BORDER REGION
BETWEEN GREECE AND BULGARIA**

Over 60 business representatives, clusters, business centers and incubators, public and other organizations and institutions working to support business in the cross-border region, as well as young people - current and future entrepreneurs, participated in a two-day tourism business forum organized by IN FOCUS Association in Blagoevgrad. The event is part of the implementation activities of the project "Strengthening the Competitiveness and Extraversion of cross-border business by implementing Innovative and Specialized Actions", with the acronym INNOBUS. The project is financed under the 6th Call for Project Proposals, under Priority Axis 01: A Competitive and Innovative Cross-Border Area of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme INTERREG V-A GREECE-BULGARIA 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund and national budgets of participating countries.

The project is implemented in partnership between four organizations: the Thessaloniki chamber of tradesmen, Greece (LP), the Professionals' association of Thessaloniki historical center, Greece, the Association of entrepreneurs Gotse Delchev region, Bulgaria and the IN FOCUS Association, Bulgaria.

The purpose of the forum was to promote successfully implemented business models by entrepreneurs in the cross-border region for stimulating the development of entrepreneurship, creating business partnerships and networking among all interested parties to achieve sustainable economic growth in the cross-border region. The event included speakers - successful entrepreneurs in the field of marketing, ICT and European programs who have developed their entrepreneurial ideas into successful businesses.

The beginning of the two-day business forum was set by the chairman of the IN FOCUS Association Yanislava Vangelova. She briefly presented the project, the partners involved in its implementation and what has been achieved so far to those gathered in the "September 22" hall in Blagoevgrad.

A highlight of the program on the first day of the forum was Baba Deshka, known throughout Bulgaria and dozens of countries around the world. The woman, whose name has become an emblem of the rural tourism, told the gathering about the beginning, the difficulties and the long way to her success. Unadulterated and authentic, Baba Deshka told how a room with an old





fashioned heater and a heart open for thousands of new friendships can turn into a successful business venture that provides sustenance for several families. And how a 50-year-old house in a secluded mountain village can become a unique place for relax, delicious food and unforgettable experiences for people from all over the planet.

Zhivko Ivanov - with many years of experience in the consulting business, presented the importance of business partnerships and networking for the development of successful entrepreneurship.

The modern ICT tools, digital marketing and advertising as a means of growth were presented by the expert in this field, Marian Kanev.

The long-time travel agent and a blogger Simana Markovska spoke about the ways and subtleties of developing responsible and sustainable tourism.

The place of bio-farming in the development of non-traditional type of tourism was presented by the manager of the bio hotel "Moravsko Selo" Zdravka Smilenova.

The first day of the forum ended with a demonstration of the VR technology as a modern way to present tourist products.

The second day of the event took place with a site visit to the "Perivolas" horse base in the village of Bachevo. The owner Ivan Nakov shared with the attendees his experience and the fact that if you strongly desire something and work to achieve it, it will happen. The participants in the forum had the opportunity to see on the spot how from one meadow and 3 horses, 23 years later - with a lot of work and a big heart, you can welcome guests from everywhere who come to you because of the beautiful animals, nature, the food and most of all because of the attitude.

On the second day of the forum, the expert of District Information Point - Blagoevgrad, Elena Mihova, presented the activities of the center, as well as examples of successfully implemented projects with European funding from the 2014-2020 program period.

The INNOBUS project implementation activities continue with a business seminar in Blagoevgrad on August 3 at 11:00 a.m. in the office of the District Information Point - Blagoevgrad and a Business Forum for Tourism in the city of Sandanski on August 4 and 5 at 10:00 a.m. in the Municipal Council hall.





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