

News Bulletin

Minister Angelkova was among the lecturers at the high-level conference on 'Attracting Investment in Tourism' of the European Commission

Tourism is among the leading economic sectors in Europe and the continent continues being the most visited one in the world. To be able to defend this, we should undertake common actions

at the level of the European Union and start perceiving ourselves more as partners than as competitors.

This is what the

Minister for tourism of Bulgaria, Nikolina Angelkova, said during the high-level conference of the European Commission 'Attracting Investment in Tourism' on **April 5th**.

The forum was opened by the European Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Elzbieta Bienkowska, and was attended by the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne Thyssen, the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Corina Cretu, members of the European Parliament, ministers from a number of EU member-states, representatives of the academic community, the tourist business etc.



Minister Angelkova was a guest speaker at the EC high-level conference



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‘The share of tourism in the GDP of Bulgaria is about 13%, which is 3% above the average for the EU. It is for this reason, namely, that the sector has been designated as a clear priority of the government and our goals are to attract more investment and achieve greater competitiveness’, Minister Angelkova noted. In her words, the sea and winter mass tourism still accounts for the main share in the country, but work is being done to popularise other specialized forms as well. Spa and eco tourism are very attractive for investors and we are eager to offer a number of administrative reliefs if strong interest has been shown’, she added.



small or medium-sized enterprises. At the same time, there are great prospects as we welcome more than 7 million foreign tourists, which is as many as the country’s population’

‘More than 26 thousand companies work in the tourist sector in Bulgaria, but most of them are

“The share of tourism in the GDP of Bulgaria is about 13%, which is 3% above the average for the EU”

The Ministry of Tourism is a beneficiary under Operational Programme Innovation and Competitiveness; it also works actively under the COSME Programme, the INTERREG Programme, etc.



The Danube Strategy, where we can deepen the partnership with countries outside the EU, is very important, too,’ the Bulgarian Minister added.

In conclusion, she drew attention to the need for greater integration of sector tourism at the level of the EU. ‘Recent events have shown how much tourism depends on security and this is another topic which needs joint coordinated action’, Minister Angelkova emphasised.

Minister Angelkova speaks to CNN's top-rated anchor Richard Quest in "Quest Means Business" Show

During her New York visit (**2nd April**) Minister Nikolina Angelkova gave an interview for one of the



most prestigious TV shows on CNN, Quest Means Business anchored by world-known journalist Richard Quest (link of the video can be viewed on the Ministry's website). Challenges to the global security and their impact on tourism as well as the migrant flow to Europe were some of the topics discussed. "Bulgaria is a leading destination in terms of price – quality", emphasized the Bulgarian Minister, "We have everything: sea, mountains, mineral springs and an impressive

number of cultural and historical monuments, she said to the world media. Minister Angelkova did not fail to note that we, the Bulgarians, are extremely hospitable.

Richard Quest is CNN's top-rated business correspondent and anchor of the popular show 'Quest Means Business', which is broadcast directly from the New-York studio of the world media. He is one of CNN's most recognizable faces. Guests of his show have been world leaders like David Cameron, some of the best-known world bankers, including Jamie Dimon, Chief Executive Officer of JP Morgan Chase, and Robert Zoellick, former president of the World Bank, as well as leading European politicians, among them Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Jose-Manuel Barroso, former president of the European Commission, Dominique Strauss Kahn, former managing director of the IMF. Some of the most influential persons of corporate America have sat in the hot seat, too, including the Chief Executive Officer and Director of DreamWorks, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and the former Chief Executive Officer of Ford, Alan Mullaly.

Richard Quest received a special gift from the Bulgarian Minister – a wood carved piece with a cowbell, which will adorn his famous New York studio.

During her visit, Nikolina Angelkova also held talks with Makiko Healy, Senior Vice President of Global Tourism Development, NYC & Company. NYC is New York City's official marketing, tourism and partnership organization. The possibilities for using the organization's expertise and experience in urban tourism marketing and the New York Brand were discussed with a view to developing this kind of tourism in Bulgaria. Meetings with representatives of leading American investment funds like Global Financial Network, Balkan Capital and Hunter Peak Investments Karsch Capital were organized. The Bulgarian minister presented the possibilities for investment in sector tourism in Bulgaria to them and pointed out that our country could offer a very good investment climate.

The video spot for Bulgaria that features Hollywood's A-listers Sylvester Stallone, Salma Hayek, Antonio Banderas, Jason Statham and Adrien Brody caused quite a stir

Bulgarian Minister speaks before students of NY University Tourism Department

The Bulgarian Minister for Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova, was a guest-lecturer to the students from the Department of Tourism at the New York University on **April 2nd**. She presented the possibilities for tourism and the importance of the sector for the econo-

Bulgarian Minister said.

The American students were impressed by the fact that some of the biggest Hollywood stars knew and spoke about Bulgaria. They watched the advertising spot with Sylvester Stallone, Jason



my of the country. Nikolina Angelkova pointed out that, according to data of the World Travel and Tourism Council, in 2015 the direct contribution of tourism to Bulgaria's GDP was over 2.8 billion Bulgarian levs. In her words, tourism, together with the economic activities related to it, accounts for about 13 % of the GDP. It is precisely because of the great economic importance of the sector that Bulgaria has had an independent Ministry of Tourism for the first time and our long-term goals are: sustainable growth and greater recognizability of our tourist product', the

Statham, Salma Hayek, Antonio Banderas and Adrien Brody and commented on their shared experiences of the country.

The students were mostly interested in the tourism opportunities for young people in Bulgaria. Minister Angelkova presented some of the attractive forms the country can offer, such as eco- and adventure tourism. Great interest caused the fact that the Bulgarian wines were among the best in the world; and our traditions in wine-making date back to the Thracians.

ASTA may hold a congress in Bulgaria

Bulgaria can host one of the editions of 'Showcase Destination' in 2017 organized by the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA). This became clear at a meeting of the Minister for Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova, and the Chief Executive Officer of the organization, Zane Kerby, in Washington on **30th March**. The aim of the event, which is traditional for the association, is to advertise the possibilities for tourism in America outside of the U. S., laying emphasis on the tourist advantages of the host country and the region. The event will also become an occasion for establishing business contacts and exchange of know-how between leading Bulgarian and American tour operators.

Earlier in the day, Minister Angelkova discussed the possibilities for exchange of experience and good practices between the two states with the Deputy Undersecretary for International Trade at the U.S. Department of Commerce, Kenneth Hyatt, in the capital



Minister for Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova, and the Chief Executive Officer of the organization, Zane Kerby

Washington. The main topic of conversation was the Brand USA and the US concept of promoting a country as a tourist destination through public-private partnership with the tourist business.

Minister Angelkova emphasized that our country could apply some of the US successful practices. Her American counterpart undertook to provide detailed information on some of the successful US models in the tourism sector. The two of them agreed that the industry needs to be consolidated so as to set up successful public-private partnerships. 'We work hard to unite the industry, which will help create a sustainable platform for a similar type of partnerships', Minister Angelkova explained. She familiarized her American counterpart with other important projects in the field of tourism, such as the development of the Unified System of Tourist Information that will connect via secure channels in real time the hotel booking systems and the competent institutions, which is to be also a step in the fight against the shadow economy.

The Ministry of Tourism held a national meeting with representatives of the EDEN network in Bulgaria

The first national meeting with representatives of the best EDEN destinations in Bulgaria was held on **April 1st**. The event was organized by the Ministry of Tourism within the project “Communication Campaign to Promote Bulgarian EDEN Destinations – Second Edition”, financed under the COSME 2014 – 2020 Programme. The EDEN destinations were representatives of the municipalities of Belogradchik, Kardzhali, Kazanlak, Sapareva Banya, Kavarna, Vratsa, Belitsa, Kyustendil and Lukovit.

“The idea of the meeting is to present the objectives and the forthcoming activities at the beginning of the project implementation, as well as to identify expectations and ideas of good performance on the part of the EDEN destinations. What matters to us is to work in partnership in order to achieve a result that is

of high quality and sustainable in time”, emphasised Milka Nanova, Director of Programmes and

Projects in Tourism Directorate at the Ministry of Tourism.

During the meeting, the participants discussed ideas, variants and possibilities for organizing and conducting cognitive tours around interesting tourist sites in the territory of the Bulgarian EDEN destinations, which would arouse greatest foreign interest. Subjects of discussion were also events and festivals of tourist interest, which are carried out annually or have been planned for 2016 and 2017 in the destinations that are planned to be popularized through the project, too.

As a result of the meeting, the representatives of the EDEN destinations declared their readiness to participate actively in the entire process of the project implementation and shared good practices from their work on popularizing tourism in the territory of their regions.

EDEN’s ultimate goal is to promote models for sustainable tourism development throughout the EU

EDEN is an acronym for European Destinations of Excellence (the best European destinations) and it is an initiative popularizing the models of sustainable development of tourism throughout the European Union.

The project ‘Communication Campaign to Popularize the Bulgarian EDEN Destinations – Second Edition’ amounts to nearly 70 thousand Euros and it is financed under the COSME Programme (the Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) 2014 – 2020 of the European Commission. Its duration is 18 months and the common goal is to promote the best Bulgarian destinations (EDEN Bulgaria) at national and selected tourist markets, as well as to raise the awareness and understanding of the EDEN initiative and the principles of sustainable development. The project aims at upgrading and developing further a project on the same topic, implemented during the period of 2011 – 2012. Its main goal is to promote the Bulgarian EDEN destinations at national and foreign tourist markets. Some of these destinations are: Silistra, Lukovit, Sandanski, Kyustendil, Belogradchik, Belitsa, Sapareva Banya, Kavarna, Vratsa, Strandzha, Kazanlak and Kardzhali.

B2B Tourism Forum was held in Moscow between representatives of Bulgaria and the Northwestern Federal District of Russia

The b2b tourism forum between representatives of Bulgaria and the Northwestern District of the Russian Federation was held in Moscow on the **25th March**. Travel companies and municipalities participating in the Moscow International Travel & Tourism Exhibition MITT got involved on the Bulgarian side and on the Russian side, experts from the administration and the specialized business from the Republic of Komi, the Republic of Karelia, the Leningrad Province, the Nenets Autonomous District and other parts of the Russian Federation. Representatives of Komiaviatrans took part in the discussion of the possibilities for organizing holidays for children from this Russian region, too.

The meeting was held at the initiative of the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism and with the assistance of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Komi with the President of the Russian Federation. During the discussion there was a video link between the Bulgarian participants and representatives of the government of the Republic of Komi, of their Ministry of Culture, Tourism and the archives of the tourist industry from that Russian region, etc.

The Bulgarian participants in the forum invited their Russian partners to a promotional tour in Bulgaria in order to familiarize them with the possibilities to organize children's holiday and family recreation.

Our tour operators presented the country's possibilities for various forms of holidays – summer, children's, family, cultural and historical routes, balneal, spa, gourmet, etc. The hosts showed marked interest in summer recreation and beach holidays in Bulgaria. The rich history of the business relationships between our country and the Republic of Komi was recalled; especially the relations in the field of timber industry where a large number of Bulgarians have worked. It was found at the meeting that it was time for these contacts to be restored and their potential and perspectives, used. All the participants agreed that the forum was an important step toward activating this partnership and setting the beginning of new useful cooperation in the field of tourism.

It was negotiated to organize exchange of information and contacts between the Bulgarian and the Russian tour operators from the region and popularize Bulgaria as a tourist destination in the Northern Federal District, regularly disseminating information about tourist supply in our country. The Bulgarian participants invited their Russian partners to a promotional tour in Bulgaria in order to familiarize them with the possibilities to organize children's holiday and family recreation.

Nikolina Angelkova and Oleg Safonov opened the Bulgarian stand at one of the biggest exhibitions on the Russian market – Inturmarket in Moscow.

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A 30% growth in the bookings for Bulgaria has been noted, according to data of the Association of Tour Operators of Russia



Bulgaria is located in one of the most central places at one of the biggest travel exhibitions on the Russian market – Inturmarket, which is held **from 19th to 22nd March**. Our stand was the first one visited by the head of the Federal Agency for Tourism of Russia, Oleg Safonov. He held a meeting with Bulgaria's Minister of Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova, and both of them greeted together the participants at the Bulgarian stand. The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Bulgaria to the Russian Federation, Boiko Kotsev, took part in the talks, too.

'The Bulgarian business reports an ever increasing interest on the part of Russia and the intensive meetings and common initiatives we have undertaken during the last year have already produced results', Minister Angelkova said. The two of them discussed the possibilities for more ambitious presentation of the Bulgarian products and the results so far have shown an increased interest in some segments, reaching up to 30%. Oleg Safonov pointed out that all this was due to the joint efforts and the dynamic actions of our country, as well as to the good cooperation with the Bulgarian Minister for Tourism. Ambassador Kotsev declared that a very good organization of work was created at the Bulgarian embassy and that visas for Russian citizens were obtained as soon as possible.

A tourist fair for presentation of Bulgaria will be organised in the centre of Moscow in June. This was agreed at a meeting of Minister Angelkova, Oleg Safonov and Vladimir Chernikov, Head of the Department of National Policy, Inter-Regional Relations and Tourism of the city of Moscow. The Russian part will assist in providing a central location in the capital, where we will be able to present outdoors the tourist opportunities offered by the country.

Data of growing demand of Bulgaria on the Russian tourist market were confirmed by Maia Lomidze, president of the Association of Russian Tour Operators, who had a talk with Minister Angelkova, too. According to her, as of now a 30% increase in early bookings for our country has been observed and many tour operators who have worked on other markets so far have started redirecting themselves to it. As of now, 30 new tour operators have applied for accreditation for work with Bulgaria.

Minister Angelkova informed that there was also a growing interest in the specialized telephone that was opened at the beginning of February for the Russian market. So far, inquiries on it have been oriented mostly to details of routes, prices of services, offers for cultural-cognitive tourism, etc. Russian customers show a growing interest not only in the traditional forms of mass tourism, summer and winter, but also in specialized offers – balneal, spa, festival, pedestrian, golf, gourmet, eco-, rural tourism, etc.

Bulgaria was a partner country at the International Tourism Exhibition in Ekaterinburg

Bulgaria was a partner country at the most important specialized exhibition in the sector in the Ural Federal District of the Russian Federation, 'Leto 2016', which was held in the city of Ekaterinburg on **9th April**. The business representatives and the visitors took a great interest in the Bulgarian stand and the exposition was organized with the official support of the Federal Agency for Tourism of Russia (FAT), the Russian Tour Industry Union and leading institutions from the Ural region. The work of the forum was joined by the head of the FAT, Oleg Safonov, the Managing Director of the Ural Tourism Association (UTA) and others.



The Bulgarian information stand, organized by the Ministry of Tourism, was located on 24 sq. m in the most central part of the Ekaterinburg-Expo International Exhibition Centre. The participants were two tourist companies and the municipality of Velingrad, which presented Bulgaria's potential for specialized balneotherapeutic, spa and wellness services to the main tourism packages. On the first day of the exhibition there was a two-hour presentation of Bulgaria as a year-round destination, which was accepted with great interest by the visitors and the media.

The tour operators and end users showed most interest in summer and sea, health and cultural and historical tourism. According to the tour operators in the region, working actively with our market, a 30-35% growth in the demand for holidays in Bulgaria has been reported and these preferences have already found expression in the increased bookings. The Fraport Representation in Bulgaria confirmed that charter flights from Ekaterinburg to the Bulgarian seaside airports are up 30% over last year, which is yet another indicator of the growing number of tourists. Par-

ticipants in the exhibition emphasized that the increased demand was a result of the active contacts between the Ministry of Tourism of Bulgaria and the Federal Agency for Tourism of Russia and the Ural Tourism Association, as well as the measures for increasing the number of Russian tourists in Bulgaria, taken by both sides. The renewed activity of the Bulgarian Consulate General in Ekaterinburg, which was officially opened on 7th April 2016, but started offering services as early as February this year, has contributed seriously along this line.

The exhibition in Ekaterinburg, which has already been present on the international market for 18 years, was held during the period of 7th – 8th April 2016. It welcomes about 10 thousand visitors from about 20 countries annually, at an average. Among the exhibitors are leading Russian and foreign tour operators, airlines and hotels, insurance companies, banks and tourist media. This year, the exhibition is covered by five central and regional televisions. One of the major topics is wellness. The traditional International Real Estate Exhibition REAL ESTATE EXPO is organized within Leto 2016.

Minister Angelkova: Over 100 thousand tourists visited Karlovo last year

Last year Karlovo welcomed over 100 thousand tourists, which is nearly twice more than the population of the municipality. This became clear during the meeting of the Minister for Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova, with the Mayor of the town, Emil Kabaivanov, representatives of the tourist business and the local authorities from other populated places in the region on the **8th April**.

'The region has all the prerequisites necessary for development of sustainable tourism. A lot of Bulgarians visit Karlovo to see Vasil Levski's birthplace but the town can attract an ever increasing foreign interest with the roses, with its Thracian heritage and the possibilities for cultural and historical tourism', Minister Angelkova said. She stated that the Ministry would support the greater visibility of the possibilities for tourism in the region at a national level. Karlovo will be a part of the journalist tours prepared by the Ministry and at the end of the year Bulgaria will host a major international conference on ancient civilisations, which is organised together with the UN World Tourism Organisation. It will focus on the Thracian civilisation and at the same time a programme accompanying the event is being planned for the delegates, which is to include the Valley of the Thracian Rulers, where Karlovo is located.

Minister Angelkova also emphasised the importance of the facilities and equipment necessary for the development of sustainable tourism, since the municipality does not have 4- and 5-star accommodation facilities and, according to evaluations of the municipality, they are short of 200 beds to meet the needs of the growing tourist flow. A few investor intentions have been discussed, as well as the development of Banya as a more competitive spa destination. The town, which is included in the list of national resorts, has 10 mineral springs and a peat bog. The water and the mineral mud are suitable for prevention and treatment of wide range of health problems.

The municipality is already working on the organisation of the Rose Festival and the celebration of Karlovo as a centre of rose-picking at the end of May. Thousands of tourists are expected to come for this celebration and over the recent years, countries like

Japan, the Netherlands and France have been taking a growing interest in it. There were guests from the USA and China last year and many more Japanese visitors are expected this year.

Later that day, Minister Angelkova and the Mayor, Mr Kabaivanov, visited the Ancient Karlovo Complex and saw the attractions in it. The abovementioned site is the result of a project under the Opera-



Minister Angelkova and the mayor of Karlovo Emil Kabaivanov (left) were greeted by the Queen of Roses

tional Programme

Regional Development 2007 – 2013, co-funded by the EU through the European Regional Development Fund. The project implementation has helped restore and socialise immovable cultural heritage in the region. The complex offers a number of tourist attractions – everybody can make paper by an old method, compose and print a text, make a herbal decoction or homemade cosmetics, learn how to carve wood, make lace, a knife, a copper pot, an engraving or an icon. Interest in the tourist attractions continues to grow and from August 2014 to the end of March 2016 it was visited by more than 16 thousand visitors.

The President of the National Assembly, Tsetska Tsacheva, and Minister Nikolina Angelkova launched the campaign Wonders of Bulgaria 2016

The European Commission allocates EUR 500 000 for projects for raising the quality of the staff in tourism in the EU. The Ministry of Tourism is already preparing a project to apply with and I hope that more organisations from the tourist sector will do this, the Minister for Tourism, Nikolina Angelkova, said during the public discussion in the Regional Historical Museum in Vratsa, organised within the sixth 'Wonders of Bulgaria' campaign of the Standart newspaper on **April 11th**. The meeting, entitled 'The Wonders of Vratsa and the North-West – New Opportunities for Development of Cultural and Historical Tourism and the Economy in the Region', was also joined by the President of the National Assembly, Tsetska Tsacheva, the Regional Governor of Vratsa, Malina Nikolova, the adviser to the Minister for Culture, Prof. Nikolay Ovcharov, the Mayor of the Town, Kalin Kamenov, mayors of other populated places in the region, experts, etc.

The North-Western Region has great potential for tourism and the proximity of the Danube River makes it an even more attractive destination', Nikolina Angelkova emphasised. According to data of the National Statistical Institute, in 2015 this part of the country was visited by over 280 thousand tourists, of whom 240 thousand were Bulgarians. 'A lot of tourists visit the region on cruise ships on the Danube and we should do our best to keep them longer here', Minister Angelkova pointed out. According to her, last year we welcomed the arrival of 183 cruise ships¹ with over 24 000 guests and forecasts for 2016 are promising, too. 'It is very important to offer the tourists more experiences.

To be able to reach national-level unanimity on which the main attractions are we have developed eight cultural-historical destinations, one of which comprises the region and bears the name 'The Wealth of the North-West', Nikolina Angelkova added. The destination includes the towns of Vratsa,



Vidin, Belogradchik, Chiprovtsi, Berkovitsa, Varshets, Mezdra, Pleven, as well as some of the most emblematic sites here.

'Speaking about the Danube, I would like to note the great opportunities we can benefit from in the framework of the Danube Strategy', the Minister for Tourism said. Bulgaria, together with Romania, is a co-coordinator under Priority Axis 3 of the Strategy – tourism and culture – and the Ministry works actively to turn our country into a generator of initiatives within its framework. The coordination centre for projects in tourism for all the 14 states in the Danube Region will start operating soon in Ruse.

The North-Western Region has great potential for tourism and the proximity of the Danube River makes it an even more attractive destination'

Minister Angelkova pointed out that in regard to the European funding in the sector, the Ministry is a beneficiary only under the Operational Programme Innovation and Competitiveness and makes efforts to seek additional possibilities to apply for investment on a competitive basis with the other EU member-states. 'We have won a project under the COSME Programme to promote Bulgarian EDEN destinations, Vratsa being one of them', she announced. The funding amounts to EUR 70 thousand and in the coming months a professional tour is to be organised in the region and promotional videos about the destinations are to be made. The project implementation will contribute to the more complete presentation of Bulgaria as a destination for ecological, cultural, spa and other kinds of specialised tourism, but also to the overcoming of the territorial and seasonal concentration of tourist flows, as well as to the increase of employment in the region.

This year, the emphasis of the Wonders of Bulgaria campaign is on the role of museums as an instrument of promoting Bulgaria beyond its borders. The Standart newspaper has proposed that the Rogozen Treasure, discovered in this part of the country, become an ambassador of Bulgaria to the world. This initiative includes the organisation of an exhibition entitled 'The Wonders of the North-West' in a European Commission hall in Brussels in 2016, dedicated to the Unification Day, 6th September. Preliminary discussions have already been conducted with the Vice-President of the European Commission, Kristalina Georgieva, with Minister Rashidov, with the Mayor of Vratsa and historians. The wonders will promote Bulgaria's cultural and historical heritage to Europe, as well as its enormous possibilities as a year-round tourist destination.

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