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PRESS RELEASE

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‘ITALY, GREECE AND TURKEY ON FOOT’ PROJECT

Certifying and Promoting a Cultural Route Between Europe and Turkey

Turkey’s Culture Routes Society (CRS), an NGO that was founded to develop, maintain and promote cultural routes in Turkey, is preparing to apply to the Council of Europe to obtain certification for the Via Eurasia, a cross-border cultural route connecting Turkey to Italy via northern Greece and the Balkans!

The **Civil Society Dialogue V** programme is financed by the EU and implemented by the Turkish Directorate for EU Affairs under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while the contracting authority is the Central Finance and Contracts Unit (CFCU). Turkey’s Culture Routes Society (CRS) has received a grant under this programme for the project named ‘Italy, Greece and Turkey on Foot’. The Society will implement this one year project in partnership with the **European Association of Via Francigena (EAVF)** based in Italy and **Trace Your Eco (TYE)** from Greece. The other organisations associated with the project include the **Via Egnatia Foundation** (Holland), the **Sultans Trail Foundation** (Holland) and three Turkish municipalities – **Bursa’s Nilüfer Municipality, İzmit Municipality and Edirne Municipality, and Puglia Regional Administration** from Italy. During the project, the partners will apply to the Council of Europe’s Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) to register a new European Cultural Route, called the **Via Eurasia (VEA)**. The VEA is a series of existing routes in and outside of Turkey stretching from Bari, Italy to Demre, Antalya. The EICR is the Luxemburg based body assigned the right to register and certify long distance thematic walking/hiking and other cultural itineraries as ‘European Cultural Routes’. If certified, the VEA will be Turkey’s first long distance cultural walking route and Europe’s longest route with a total length of over 5000 kms.

This action builds on a CSD IV project, ‘Europe to Turkey on Foot’, successfully completed in February 2017, during which CRS studied and implemented the EAVF’s operational model in the management of cultural routes in Turkey. The project outcome included several publications to support route users, joint route maintenance activities, and securing the involvement of Turkey’s local and national administrations. During this new project, a **scientific and a management committee** will be formed to prepare the **application dossier to be submitted** to the Council of Europe by the end of September 2019. Other activities include a study visit to Puglia-Italy with representatives of the Turkish and Greek municipalities and routes in order to experience a European route management model; road-shows in Turkey and Greece to promote the Via Eurasia and obtain more involvement and support of local walking clubs and administrations; a volunteer group activity to way-mark some sections of the route according to European standards; applications to relevant conservation councils to register ruins along the VEA; developing promotional products/services including a short film, updates on the smart-phone app and the VEA website; preparation and dissemination of visibility and route user materials and a final conference for existing and new stakeholders. Our new Municipality partners Edirne, İzmit and Nilüfer will join Demre, İnegöl and Eğirdir Municipalities in actively supporting the route.





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Mr. Hüseyin Eryurt, CRS representative and the project coordinator, says that ‘the Turkish Republic is one of the latest countries to join and sign the Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA), a Council of Europe protocol that supports dissemination of European Cultural Routes. Hence, this project will provide a great opportunity for Turkey to participate in the formation of the Via Eurasia, which will become the Council of Europe’s longest route’. The Italian project coordinator Luca Bruschi said ‘I am looking forward to linking our routes in a cross-border project expressing European and Turkish cultural values.’ Both Luca Bruschi and Theodoros Trachanadisi who represents the Greek organisation TYE, expressed their satisfaction with this project, which will not only strengthen the cooperation between the partner countries, but also bring a brand new sustainable tourism product certified by the Council of Europe.

The ‘Italy, Greece and Turkey On Foot’ project is supported under the Civil Society Dialogue Programme V financed by the European Union. CSD is a programme bringing together civil society organisations from the EU and Turkey around common topics, to exchange knowledge and experience, and to build a sustained conversation between the organisations.

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Programme:

www.civilsocietydialogue.org

Partners:

- 1) Culture Routes Society - www.culturerolesinturkey.com Facebook/Instagram: CultureRoutesSociety
- 2) European Association of Via Francigena – www.viefrancigene.org; Facebook: ViaFrancigena
- 3) Trace Your Eco - <https://www.traceyoureco.gr/>; Facebook: TraceYourEco

The Associate Organizations: Via Egnatia Foundation (Holland), Sultans Trail Foundation (Holland) Bursa’s Nilüfer Municipality (Mysia Ways), İzmit Municipality (Tolerance Way) and Edirne Municipality (Sultans Trail), and Puglia Regional Administration from Italy (Via Francigena del Sud).

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