

Ambassador Skarstein's speech

Monday 1st of June 2015: Project «Vulnerability/Impact Studies with a focus on Tourism and Critical Infrastructures»

Dear Project partners,

Representatives of REC

And honourable guests

- It is a great pleasure for me to be here today at the project opening of the project **“Vulnerability/Impact Studies with a focus on Tourism and Critical Infrastructures”**.
- Norway is not a member of the EU. However, since the year 1994, Norway has, together with Iceland and Lichtenstein, provided considerable funding to cohesion and the reduction of social and economic disparities within the **European Economic Area** – including Hungary. The EEA Agreement gave the EEA EFTA states, Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein, access to the internal market on the same terms as EU member states more than twenty years ago. The agreement is therefore our most important trade agreement to date, and constitutes, together with WTO and EFTA free trade agreement, the mainstay of Norwegian trade policy.
- Through the EEA agreement, a common goal to reduce disparities in the countries within the European Economic Area was established. Despite positive development trends over the last 20 years, there are challenges facing several EEA countries that needs to be acknowledged. **The EEA and Norway Grants is our respond to these challenges**. Through the Grants we can provide funding to **16 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe in 32 programme areas in different sectors**. The EEA

Grants are jointly financed by Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway, subject to their size and economic wealth, which means Norway provides 97% of the funding. The Norway Grants were established by Norway independently of the other two.

- Here in Hungary, the donor countries and Hungary, **selected 12 areas** where both parties agreed on the need for improvement. The funds of **EEA Grants support seven programme areas**, and Norway Grants covers **five programme areas**.
- One of the selected EEA Grants' programme in Hungary is **the adaption to climate change**. Its programme operator is **the Regional Environmental Centre**.
- Today we have research and information confirming that nature works in a less balanced way than before. Observations gathered throughout the years conclude that climate changes have negative implications for people all over the world. This is a challenge also in Norway. Sea level rise and extreme weather events cause trouble for the infrastructure of coastal and rural areas all over Norway. Heavy rain and other challenges caused by the weather expose communities all over Norway to landslides, road damages, avalanches and other natural disasters that cause road accidents and blocked roads that isolate small settlements completely for weeks at a time. Furthermore, it can negatively influence the potential of tourism, as heavy weather can have negative impacts on tourists' comfort and ability to explore the nature of Norway.
- These challenges are the same all over the world, and confirm the necessity of adaptation to climate change in an effective manner. We have a moral obligation to secure the future, also for future generations. That necessitates adaptation to new climate conditions. Events caused by extreme weather will have

negative effects on tourism and infrastructure in Hungary too, and that is the main objective of this project.

- As an important goal of the EEA and Norway Grants is the strengthening of bilateral relations, we work closely with the partners in the beneficiary countries, with an aim to help them respond to challenges and achieve common goals. The grants are not supposed to function as a one-way street: our approach is not just that of a donor – it is also that of a partner. This project is a good example of such bilateral cooperation, in which Norway and Hungary work together as partners. The value of programmes being implemented through cooperation and interaction between donor and beneficiary states is great and brings benefits for both the beneficiary and donor countries alike. A wide range of both public authorities and institutions, as well as organisations and businesses partake in these partnerships projects.
- I am very happy to see that the priorities set by our countries are on the way to being realized: The project **“Vulnerability/Impact Studies with a focus on Tourism and Critical Infrastructures”** is an excellent example of the cooperation and development that can be fostered within the framework of the EEA and Norway Grants.
- I congratulate you on your engagement and commitment. The project is focusing on an important issue that concerns us all, across country borders. I am looking forward to follow the project implementation and results, and I wish you all the best in the final phases of your project, which we will continue to follow with great interest.
- Thank you!