

USAID and National Geographic promote Albania and Balkan Neighbors

TIRANA, JULY 21, 2010 Thanks to the support of USAID, Albania is one of six countries featured in a special supplement of the June edition of National Geographic Traveler Magazine. ***The Western Balkans Land of Discovery*** showcases the natural, historical and cultural treasures of the region. The supplement was provided to tour operators and businesses at a reception held today in Tirana. Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Ferdinand Xhaferaj, USAID/Albania Mission Director, Joseph C. Williams, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edith Harxhi delivered remarks at the event.

Cut off from the rest of the world for 50 years, Albania is still largely unknown outside of Europe and has had difficulties overcoming negative stereotypes related to poverty, corruption, and crime and unlike its Balkan neighbors, Albania has had to address significant disadvantages, namely its poor infrastructure, unplanned urban development, and lack of investments, said Williams at the event. More must and can be done to preserve Albania's cultural heritage, conserve natural resources, and protect precious archeological and historical monuments.

Both regionally and at the country level, USAID is helping to promote Albania's image as an inviting and unique tourist destination. Last month, the National Geographic Traveler magazine published a 47-page supplement on the Western Balkans, with photos and articles on the history, cuisines, and culture of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The supplement accompanied the June 2010 English-language issue of National Geographic Traveler Magazine distributed to over 220,000 subscribers in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Germany.

Copies of the publication are available through the National Tourism Agency, the Albanian Tourism Association and USAID's Rritje Albania project for foreign tour operators and Albanian embassies and consulates to promote Albania and regional tour packages.

Tourism is recognized as an important sector of Albania's economy, with the possibility of reaching small and medium enterprises in the more remote and poverty stricken areas of the country.

About Rritje Albania Rritje Albania, USAID's Competitive Enterprise Development project, promotes sustained, broad-based economic growth in Albania by expanding trade and investment, increasing enterprise productivity, and improving Albania's workforce. The project assists non-agricultural enterprises in becoming more competitive, increasing sales, and creating additional jobs. For more information on USAID Albania's initiatives in Tourism, visit <http://albania.usaid.gov> or contact Rritje Albania at info@rritjealbania.com.