

Nino Merola's Interview: "Recognize Your Values"

The new director of Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in Tirana speaks about the Agency's performance and the new projects.



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Last Year's Roma Action Plan - What's Happened?



8

An Op-Ed at the occasion of Roma Day by **Brian Williams**, UN Resident Coordinator to Albania. A moment for reflection on the challenges that Roma and Egyptian communities face

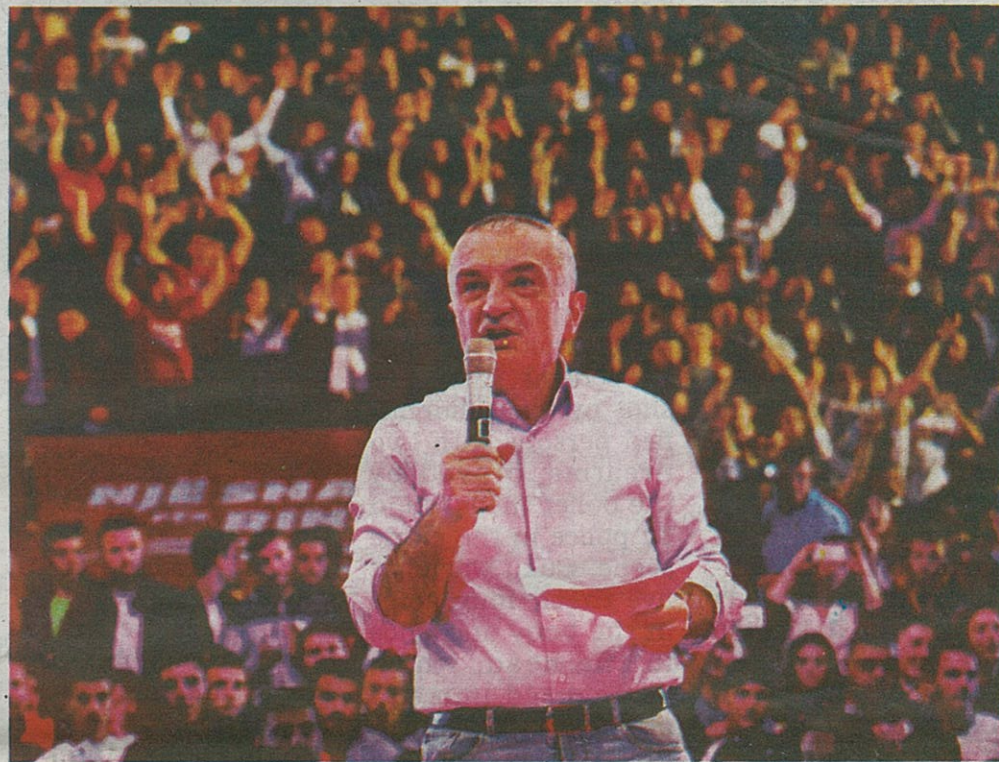
SMI LEADER MESSAGES TO SP, DP

'Enough with One Man Show'

At a meeting with youths from all over the country, Meta called on PM Rama and opposition leader Basha to sit and solve the political crisis.

"The country doesn't have time to waste with arrogance and ultimatums"

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DAY'S BRIEFING



Rama Confirms Election on June 18
PM Edi Rama confirmed once again that the Socialist Party will enter elections on June 18

see on page 3

Former Vlora Police Director Assassinated

Artan Cuku was killed on Saturday by two unidentified persons, while 3 mln Leks are offered by Police in exchange of valuable information

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Basha Attacks CEC Chairman

DP leader attacked chairman of CEC for his action to postpone the deadline for registration.

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Apollonia Archaeological Park Opens on April 24

Following the restoration process, April will be the month of marking an immense work in Apollonia Archaeological Park

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Aplikacioni "Speed Taxi"
REZERVO & GJURMO TAKSINË
...i thjeshtë, i shpejtë, i sigurt...

FAIR OPENED ITS DOORS IN EXPOCITY

1st Mediterranean Tourism Fair Held

"Unraveling more of Albania". Minister of Economic Development and Tourism *Ekonomi* noted that through this fair, government aimed at putting Albania into the international calendar of fairs

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FORUM

International Mediators Should Intervene

Former President **Bamir Topi** calls for international intervention in order to solve the political crisis in the country, as otherwise Albania would have to face a tense situation.

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36 PEOPLE KILLED IN EGYPT

Terror Attack at Two Coptic Churches

ISIS claimed (a not independently confirmed) responsibility for Egypt's Palm Sunday church bombings in Tanta and Alexandria. President el-Sisi calls National Defense Council

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INTERVIEW

"Development Protecting Our Environment"

Mr. Li Yuqiang, Deputy Director-General at Foreign Affairs and Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of Jiangxi Province speaks to ADN on his region's successes and challenges.

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

“Recognize Your Values”

The new director of Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in Tirana, Mr. Nino Merola speaks about the Agency's performance so far and the new projects in collaboration with Albanian counterparts. He has some very encouraging messages to convey...

BY DENISA CANIA

The Italian Cooperation has a long-term collaboration with the Albanian Government. Tourism and environmental protection are two of the cooperation fields, which also could further result as a powerful combination for country's economic development. Mr. Nino Merola, director of Italian Agency for Development Cooperation in Tirana, is convinced that Albania has a yet-to-be-discovered potential in this aspect. Mr. Merola details in this interview the Agency's collaboration with Albanian government, the main projects and goals and encourages Albanians to recognize their values and to create an integrated system for a balanced management of the territory and sustainable development without trying to “go big”; because appreciation of the tradition and local hospitality with diverse tourism offers, is what tourism is about nowadays.

-Mr. Merola, the Italian Cooperation is participating at the first Mediterranean Tourism Fair, at Expocity, organized by the Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade and Entrepreneurship. This is a great opportunity to present the work done so far in the field.

Could you please give an overview of the projects you are implementing in the frame of environment and tourism?

Albania is a country which has wonderful beauties, is rich on natural resources, culture, hospitality, which often are not known and fully appreciated especially by foreigners. Environmental protection is obviously a priority. Preservation of Albanian natural resources is a fundamental component for the economic development of the country, especially for rural and coastal communities.

The Italian Cooperation has a long-term collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and the National Agency for Protected Areas. There is an important project currently under implementation - NaturAL - which is related to Natura 2000

network, financed by the European Union and co-financed and implemented by the Italian Cooperation, and implemented in 10 selected protected areas from the north to the south of Albania.

Another successful project has been recently completed, fully financed by the Italian Government; it served for strengthening management skills of the Albanian Ministry of Environment. Many Italian Non-Governmental Organizations operate in Albania, with their projects financed by the Italian Cooperation and dealing with small and medium entrepreneurs, related to sustainable tourism development while boosting local tradition.

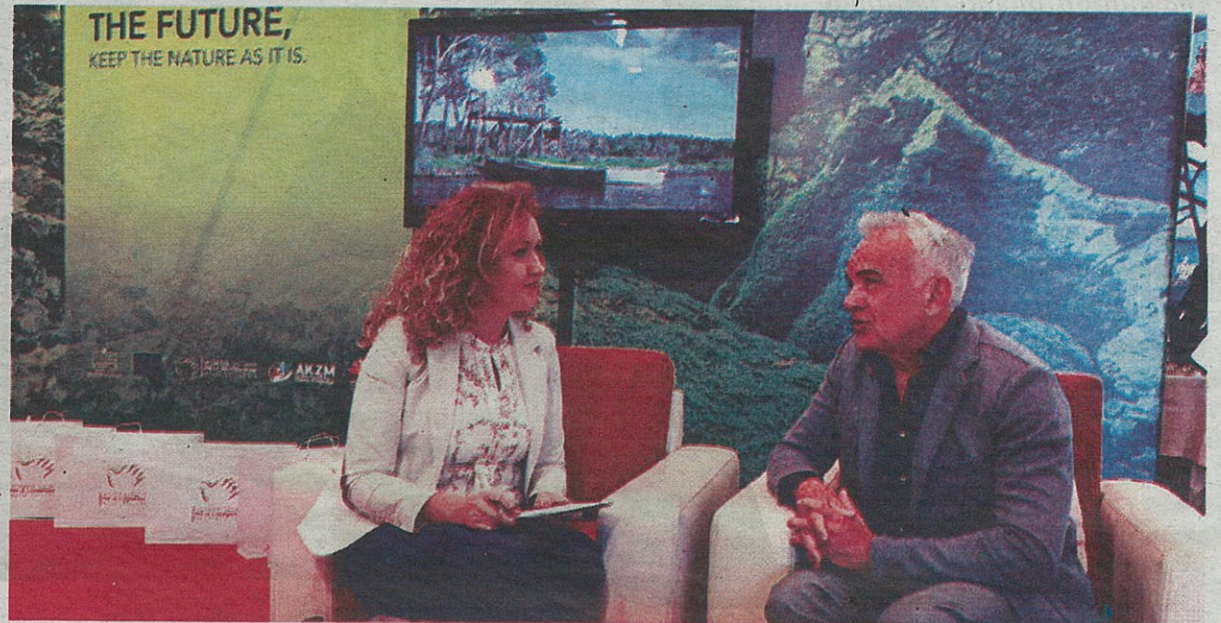
In general, these projects have a great impact on the life quality of the entire Albanian population.

-Why this activity has such a great importance and, according to your opinion, are the Protected Areas a potential for tourism development?

It is very important that for the first time in Albania the great potential of tourism is highlighted. It is more than evident that the landscape and the natural resources are the main attractions of the country, on which to invest, but it is also important to recognize their values and to create an integrated system for a balanced management of the territory and sustainable development: A process that includes control over the resources, appreciation of the tradition, and local hospitality with diverse tourism offers.

Nowadays, the tourism market appreciates the quality of small local things such as the guesthouses more than big infrastructure facilities. The internet and the web pages have shown that tourists are aware and able to identify and appreciate even the less known localities.

In this perspective the protected areas in Albania are the absolute protagonists on the center of a big dynamic development, from the agricultural food to the cultural heritage promotion.



-How can local communities benefit from the Protected Areas?

The Protected Areas protecting the natural habitats are the basis to ensure development of the rural areas. They are the starting point of a very positive economic and social dynamic for the community and the small enterprises. They create new working possibilities, and I'm referring to familiar enterprises, small farmers, or cultural interest sectors.

Ecosystem services offer many benefits, an additional value for the life quality of the local community: the healthy local products are touristic attraction. Let me give you an example. In order to have agriculture of quality you should have a fertile land. The Italian Cooperation has promoted the reciprocal exchanges of the two countries. Slow Food for example is an Italian excellence which has given its brand to many Albanian products. And this is a very good practice to be promoted.

-What can be done to improve protected areas administration on a local level? In which areas is NaturAL project focused on?

NaturAL project is implemented since 2015 and there is a team of Albanian, Italian and international experts working on it. The project partners are IUCN and Italian Botanic Society.

The experts work in close collaboration with National Agency for Protected Areas,

under Italian Agency for Development Cooperation coordination.

Strengthening institutional capacities for protected areas administration is the result of the above mentioned collaboration. Other important results are biodiversity efficient protection and enhancing of ecosystem services; both are a great asset that Albania has.

The project has provided means of transport, equipment, infrastructure and technical training to RAPA staff. The project is aimed at implementing existing management plans of at least 5 Protected Areas: Llogara National Park, Divjake - Karavasta National Park, Korab - Koritnik National Park, Mali i Tomorrit National Park and Bredhi i Hotoves National Park.

The objective is to extend the environmental protection system through the Natura 2000 European Network. This is an important step toward environment and tourism in Albania.

-Does the Italian Cooperation finance other projects in the frame of tourism development?

I wanted to underline the commitment of the Italians in building efficient and modern infrastructures. In particular, it is very important the Italian contribution in the electricity sector - almost a 100 million Euro investment. We have carried out important projects and we are still working on projects imple-

mentation. In collaboration with the Albanian Ministry of Energy and Industry, we have built the electrical substations of Kashar and the one in the center of Tirana. Also we have built the Control and Dispatch center in Tirana, with the new headquarters of TSO - Transmission System Operator, within the building.

There is a new project of about 18 million euro, focused on restructuring of the electricity network in an important touristic area in southern coast of Albania, Dhermi and Himare.

In collaboration with Albania, we have built in the north of the country the road section of Shkoder - Hani i Hotit, which links Albania to Montenegro, an investment of more than 20 million euro. This means more roads, more services, and therefore more tourists.

-How do you see the future of the Italian Cooperation in Albania?

In a sustainable development perspective, the Italian Cooperation is fully committed to be the main partner of Albania in the maritime area development programs, to be carried out from the north to the south of Albania. We are ready for new projects in the frame of environment, tourism, infrastructure, services and health care system. Italy is not near Albania only geographically, but also it's a human, institutional and professional connection between the two countries.