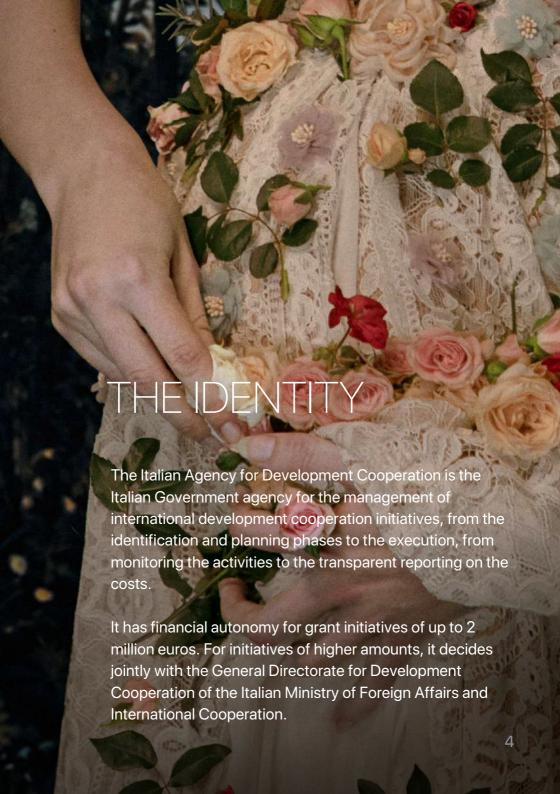


# PARTONE

Towards a sustainable Europe.



The Agency monitors soft loan cooperation initiatives and, in partnership with the National Governments, manages debt swap programs.

It leads the Italian development cooperation system abroad: Italian national institutions, regions, municipalities, universities, civil society and private companies.

It can lead or be partner of cooperation initiatives funded by the European Union and by international public and private donors.

Starting from the political guidelines given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and in daily dialogue with national Governments abroad, it contributes to the Italian cooperation strategies and, in compliance with the local ownership of development programs, plans the international cooperation initiatives funded by the Italian Government.

In the Western Balkans, the Agency is part of the international donors community. It works to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and the European integration of the Region, with a view to civil coexistence, respect for human rights and

environmental sustainability.

Albania is a priority Country for the Italian cooperation commitment. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia are secondary Countries in a coherent strategy of European integration, increased quality of life, good governance and peace.

The Agency shares institutional excellence and Italian capabilities: culture, good governance, civil protection, infrastructures, healthcare, agri-food, new technologies, social inclusion, environmental protection, promotion of local identities and responsible tourism, to name the main areas of intervention.

It works from a co-development perspective, far from the idea of aid. Through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, Italy contributes together with the Governments of the Region to building the bridge for the European daily life of citizens and local institutions, respecting freedom, diversity, reciprocity and historical, environmental, human richness of its Countries.

#### THE CHANGE

July 19th, 2022 is a historic day. The European Union has opened accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. A turning point in the integration process, which Italy has been working since the beginning for. It's a radical change of perspective for both countries.

Italy supports the full European integration of the Region. The ongoing work of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation follows the historical vision of reconciliation, peaceful coexistence of local communities and respect for the many cultural identities that make the Western Balkans so important for Italy and the European Union, a unique place in the current geopolitical context.

It is a path still affected by critical and deep-rooted issues. The risk of stalemate has not been overcome, but it is a path clear in its objectives and shared by everyone, especially the new generations. In this history of cooperation, Italy has been a pioneer and protagonist since the fall of the communist regimes of the 1990s, from the overcoming of the first humanitarian emergencies, to the phase of democratic reconstruction and essential infrastructure: roads, energy and water distribution networks, public institutions, hospitals, schools.

June 27th, 2002 is a historic day, representative of the constant Italian contribution to the birth of a new Europe sustainable over time and free from conflicts, as imagined by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi in the Ventotene Manifesto. The President of the Republic of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, laid the first stone of the reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge destroyed during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. His words are the seed of the change underway and the core of Italy's commitment for the European integration of the Region.

"The destruction, in 1993, of the Mostar Bridge, a masterpiece of 16th century Islamic architecture, was an offense to our common cultural values and to a heritage which, in this Region, constitutes a common inheritance.

Today's presence here in Mostar, together with representatives of the donor Countries, the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, UNESCO, the Stability Pact and the OSCE, shows the effectiveness of the commitment, the more synergetic the more effective, of the international community.

We know you are Europe. We want you in Europe. Otherwise we wouldn't be here. But external aid can never replace your good will. The Countries of this area will become an integral part of Europe if they have the strength to choose to live, work together, collaborate.

For too long nationalism and totalitarianism have been the ruin of Europe. From today, the Mostar Bridge returns to being a symbol of the values of European civilization, a civilization rich in multiple traditions and a common perspective inspired by the values of freedom and fundamental human rights."



#### THE PRESENT

Military aggression against Ukraine has brought war back to Europe after decades of peace.

This is the worst news for anyone who harbored the unjustified belief that civil coexistence, respect for people's dignity and quality of life, values that are firmly European today, were safe from risk. The violent resumption of conflict in Israel has added new instability in the Mediterranean. In Africa and Middle East conditions of violence continue to exist under the ruins. The war has a direct impact on Italy and the European Union in terms of security and migratory flows.

Despite the winners, it is a defeat for everyone. International governmental cooperation is the major foreign policy instrument that Italy is implementing, for the affirmation of the rule of law and a shared quality of life.

The European Union is an anchor of sustainability and protection of civil rules and human rights.

In line with the Union's strategy, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation has identified four macro-areas of intervention in which it can offer concrete added value to the Governments of the Region in the accession process. First, good governance, for local institutions and public services equally and effectively provided to citizens, in line with European standards. Second, new generations, with a particular focus on the link between training, work and new businesses. Third, social inclusion, with a constant commitment to the elimination violence against women. Forth, nature and culture, the two sides of the same coin, a macro-area in which Italy has a well known expertise, can make a difference and contribute to change.

The lesson of the 1990s is clear. Italian law 125/2014 attributes to international governmental cooperation the task of preventing conflicts, through dialogue and institutional collaboration, with a view to co-development and inclusion. The Balkan Peninsula is a region of extraordinary importance and human and cultural richness. The benefit of integration, of the balance between powers, of the fight against monopolies and corruption, of respect for local identities is evident. Living together is the only guarantee of sustainable and mutual development. Countries and men alone in command of the war are and remain countries and men alone.

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### SECOND PART

Bridges of peace, quality of life and mutual development.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For all financial data and further information, see also 2021 Annual Report and 2022 Annual Report on italybridgeswesternbalkans.eu

#### THE RULES

The first bridge of peace, quality of life and development, o which Italy contributes alongside the Governments of the Region, is that of good governance, the rule of law and the adaptation of the local regulatory framework and public services to European Union standards.

On the one hand, the justice reform in Albania. The first initiative to mention in this perspective is Support for the Albanian School of Judiciary in the context of constitutional reform. Completed in 2023, it strengthened the training system to support a new generation of magistrates. It collated and shared for the first time the Civil and Criminal Codes and the Civil and Criminal Procedure Codes in Albania. Today SPAK, the most important Albanian national institution in the fight against organized crime and corruption, has, in the Codes, an effective tool that did not exist before.



This is a fundamental added value brought by Albania-Italy government cooperation to the ongoing reform process. The project consolidated the international relations of the Albanian judiciary already active with some leading Italian institutions such as the Superior Council of the Judiciary, the National Anti-Corruption Authority and the Higher School of the Magistracy. The initiative was aimed with particular commitment at students, girls and boys who are preparing to enter the new national justice system, with the belief that the real reform is precisely the affirmation of a new and stronger sense of the State brought by the new generations of magistrates. One indicator more than others gives a good image of the action implemented: the number of those admitted to the courses of the Albanian School of Judiciary has increased from 30 to 80.

The second initiative involving the AICS Headquarters in Tirana is a delegated cooperation initiative 70% co-financed by the European Union. It's called EU for Justice. It is an initiative launched in 2023 which aims to strengthen the independence of the Albanian national judiciary and the fight against corruption. The activities that have just begun are in continuity with the broader commitment of the European Union on the reform of the

judicial system in Albania. Italy is, in this action which aims to contribute to successfully completing the accession process, leading an international team, completed by Expertise France and the Fundación Internacional Y Para Iberoamérica De Admón Y Políticas Públicas. The ramification of the local justice system requires an active presence in the territory. The reform cannot remain on paper. It has to be real. The shared commitment of the international community alongside the Albanian Government makes the reform process more stable and rapid. Italy will continue to be at the forefront.

On the other hand, in parallel with the work for justice reform, work is underway in Albania for the creation of a national Civil Protection system, inspired by the Italian model: central management, departments active in the territory and a body of volunteers.

Also in this case, there are two initiatives currently being completed and launched that are important to mention. The first, Creation of a national operations center for civil emergencies, has already allowed Albania to equip itself with a headquarters in Tirana for the new Albanian National Civil Protection Agency. The Headquarters has a central operations room capable of coordinating with the

authorities at a local level in case of emergencies. The training and training courses for Albanian operators are being completed, including with missions in Italy. In this commitment to governmental cooperation, the AICS Headquarters in Tirana shares with the Albanian Government some recognized Italian institutional excellences such as the Civil Protection Department of the Presidency of the Council and the Civil Protection of the Metropolitan City of Florence.

The medium-term objective, thanks to a second initiative in this field, Enhancing Civil Protection capacity in Albania, is to consolidate the Albanian National Civil Protection, activating a widespread intervention system, with Civil Protection departments on territory and the volunteer corps. It is an initiative in continuity with the previous one, which arises from the close daily collaboration between AICS Tirana and the Albanian National Civil Protection Agency. The start of activities is expected in 2024. A third area of intervention on the rules is important to mention: that of adapting phyto-sanitary controls to European standards.

AICS Tirana's partner in this segment of the Italian government cooperation commitment, in Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is the Ciheam of Bari, an international body recognized for the development of sustainable policies for agriculture and fishing and for quality of production chains. Having phytosanitary certainties on imports and exports is the basis of a shared future in the European market. National laboratories, with a particular focus on customs controls, are in the process of adapting to European regulatory standards, both in terms of technologies and human resources skills.

An exemplary result among all in this sector is the inauguration in 2023 of the new laboratory for phytosanitary analyzes in Durazzo, a port and customs city. An improved and now adequate phytosanitary laboratory is a fundamental added value, brought by the Albanian Italian governmental cooperation. A change in facts on the accession path, which guarantees producers and consumers of all countries.



## THE NEW GENERATIONS

That of the new generations is the most important bridge of peace, quality of life and development in Italy's governmental cooperation strategy for the Western Balkans. A common and sustainable future over time starts here. The Tirana Office of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation expects a positive impact on the selfconfidence and hopes of girls and boys living in the Region from the initiatives financed, directly or indirectly. They are the real engine of change.

There are many aspects addressed: school, university, professional training, work, new entrepreneurship. Innovation and competitiveness are fundamental elements for the new generations, especially for the development of rural areas, but not only. Even in this case, tomorrow cannot remain on paper. Without concrete opportunities for economic development for work and businesses, the new generations will continue to plan a future abroad.

There are numerous initiatives financed by Italy for schools, from nursery schools to high schools, and for the universities of the region. In this field, government cooperation began immediately after the fall of the old communist regimes. In 30 years, dozens of kindergartens, elementary, middle and high schools have been built, rebuilt or equipped with Italian funds and with the Italian Albanian Debt Conversion Program. Just a few examples among many. In Albania, the Agricultural Schools of Fier and Bushat, the new kindergartens of Korça and Elbasan, the High School of Ballagat or the schools in the villages of Flog and Novosele in the Municipality of Vlore. These are concrete examples of new growth and training opportunities, from 0 to 18 years old, which now offer international standards to Albanian girls, boys and families. This work plan for childhood and adolescence

has been carried out consistently throughout the Balkan Peninsula. Worth mentioning is the work for the reform of pre-school institutions in Kosovo. The activities aim to make the offer of childcare services homogeneous and in line with European models. These are interventions, spread across the territory and operated in close contact with local institutions, which well represent the complexity but also the importance of the social change underway, in the certainty that the prevention of war and social conflicts begins right from the school.

There are many universities involved and bridges between universities created, especially in Albania with the universities of Korça, Elbasan and Tirana. The Italian Universities of Bologna, Genoa, Florence, Macerata, Trento are active in updating professional curricula, technical interventions in the area to protect natural capital and cultural heritage, the adaptation of courses to Italian training standards and models. This consistent work over time includes the post-graduate Masters in human rights and democracy, held from 2013 to 2021 at the University of Sarajevo, which contributed to the birth of a new generation of managers, entrepreneurs, professionals in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more qualified and European.

The demand for economic opportunities, work and new entrepreneurship is a priority for girls and boys in the Western Balkans. To understand more deeply the character of the new generations of the Region it may be useful to highlight one aspect. While in the Countries of the current European Union the demand for economic security emerges from the new generations whose main aim is to affirm their own personal life path in a society stable in its fundamental values, the new Balkan generations, got out of war and instability, more accustomed to insecurity, ask first and foremost for opportunities.

They have the strenght to contribute not only to their personal future, but also and above all to the broader European change of their countries, making those fundamental values an instrument for the stability and sustainability of the European future of the Region. There is no doubt that investing in them is the real key to the success of the Italian and European commitment to integration in all its aspects.



The change underway resembles the generational conflict between fathers and sons. Governmental cooperation can mediate between the past and the future of the Region, on the one hand eliminating the obstacles that arise from short-term management of the local reform process, and on the other hand supporting the natural reform force of the new generations. From this perspective, it is not just a question of lifting the countries of the Region out of poverty, which is still widespread particularly in its rural areas, or of reforming non-European institutional systems in the provision of public services to citizens, from schools to healthcare, from justice to the protection of environmental and cultural capital, from energy to new essential infrastructures. It's about growing together, effectively creating bridges between the new generations of Europe, through common study paths, networks of new entrepreneurship and sharing professional skills.

To the new Balkan generations, Italy contributes to providing valid answers through two main tools: the financial one and that of good practices.

There are three financial formulas implemented by Italy: soft loans, microcredits and grants.

The soft loans, managed by the Ministry of Finance and

awarded through the main banks in Albania, are particularly oriented towards the technological adaptation and environmental sustainability of the production chains. They are in fact an important tool for co-development and support for entrepreneurial and commercial relations in the private sector between Albania, Italy and the European Union. One fact above all is explanatory: today the vast majority of the Albanian olive sector uses Italian technology in processing.

Microcredits and grants are an extraordinarily effective tool, which over time, thanks above all to the commitment of Italian civil society in collaboration with the Besa Funds in Albania, has made it possible to consolidate a stable productive micro-enterprises, which have contributed to the success of tourism development by improving the local offer, has created real job opportunities in rural areas and has provided a concrete alternative to migration.

Among the models shared by the AICS Headquarters in Tirana for the development of a Balkan European new generation, there is that of Italian villages. The glocalization of the rural areas of the Balkan Peninsula, achieved by protecting the natural and cultural capital,

enhancing the typical features and territorial identities, improving the tourist offer and the production chains, starting from the agri-food sector, is a development process and an added value specific given by Italy to the change underway, which has an undisputed international model in Italian villages. This is a concrete alternative and a real perspective for the new generations, who through the rediscovery and reinvention of their land can create virtuous economic micro-cycles that are stable over time and affirm a new territorial narrative that will first and foremost enrich the European Union.

The ongoing intervention plan, based on the creation of new public and private professionals and business networks, is carried out with local communities by Italian Regions and Municipalities, as well as by civil society, people for people. Activities and results fall under the umbrella of the Made With Italy ethical brand, owned by the AICS headquarters in Tirana. The brand promotes the best success stories of cooperation initiatives financed by the Italian Government in the Region: institutions, people, companies and associations. It is a communication tool for the sustainability of development processes, the enhancement of new generations and the stabilization of areas at greatest risk of migration. Presented at EXCO

2019 at the Rome Fair, in 2022 it was indicated by the Italian Court of Audit, an Institution of constitutional importance, as a best practice of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation. Within the limits set by the disciplinary - the brand, for example, is awarded only to micro-enterprises -, it fully represents the Italian approach to governmental cooperation and the new generations. The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation promotes a co-development strategy towards the European integration of the Region, far from the concept of aid.

Today there are more than 130 beneficiaries of the Made With Italy ethical brand, active from North to South of Albania. The AICS headquarters in Tirana is working to extend the brand in all its Countries of competence. Visit madewithitaly.earth for more information.



#### THE NEIGHBOURS

The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation places the value of the Person at the center of its International commitment. This is a pillar of its programming, along with the protection of the Planet's environmental and cultural resources, economic Prosperity, strenghtening of Peace and governmental Partnership.

Consistently, in the initiatives underway and in the ones planned in the Countries of the Balkan Peninsula, the AICS Headquarters in Tirana focuses its resources on the development of a new European citizenship of the communities, on the protection of regional nature and cultures, and on a sustainable and shared economic

growth, in constant dialogue with national governments. In support of the new European citizenship of the inhabitants of the Region, Italy has approved and financed over time dozens of initiatives carried out by civil society and United Nations agencies for the affirmation of human rights and the broadest social inclusion.

The framework of the financed interventions has many common aspects and fundamental priorities: gender equality and the elimination of violence against women, the inclusion of people with disabilities, public services for the weakest groups, the social reintegration of ex-prisoners, civil rights. These are evidently very different areas of intervention, but they have in common a fundamental and essential point for the change underway: the dignity of all citizens. Excluding, in the name of economic development, is not an option on the table. Joining the European Union means guaranteeing the equality of all citizens before the institutions. There are two main areas. The first concerns public services and the adaptation of the local regulatory frame work to European standards. The second concerns communities on the ground and the promotion of human rights.



It's an ongoing plan of work, but there are many results already achieved worth to be listed. The following are only the most recent. In 2023, the new emergency department of the Vlora Hospital was inaugurated. The initiative was implemented by Meyer Hospital of Florence. Thanks to this initiative, dozens of first aid points have been installed along the coast, offering for the first time a reliable service to a user base of hundreds of thousands of citizens and tourists. The Municipality of Tirana today has a new center for the treatment and management of psychiatric disabilities, created with an initiative carried out by the Italian organization Giovanni XXIII.

Also in Tirana, the Mother Teresa Hospital has a new department for neonatal audiological screening. This is a fundamental added value in the prevention of hearing disabilities and a saving over time of the economic and human costs that many families had to face before this service could be offered. Thanks to coordination with the hospitals of Durazzo, Elbasan, Fier and Korça, the service is available to the majority of Albanian families. The initiative was carried out by Save The Children which in Bosnia & Herzegovina, in the canton of Tuzla, with another initiative financed by the Italian Government, created a

center for childhood disabilities, with multi-specialist services for the families of the area. Finally, in this necessarily concise list, the new cardiac surgery department of the Pristina Hospital in Kosovo has made it possible to eliminate the list of patients awaiting surgery as early as 2021. More information on the institutional web pages and social profiles of the AICS Headquarters in Tirana and on iadsa.it, the official website of the Italian-Albanian Debt Conversion Programme.

Thanks to the collaboration with the Italian civil society associations Engim and Libera and the Albanian National Agency for Confiscated Assets (AASPK), new micro-businesses were born in buildings seized from organized crime in Fier and Elbasan. Worth mentioning are the Tradita Ime Artizanale textile workshop in Elbasan and the Ke Buono pastry shop in Fier.

In 2022, following the visit of the Special Envoy of the Farnesina for LGBTQI+ rights Fabrizio Petri, the AICS Headquarters in Tirana produced the first commercial ever planned in Albania on national networks to overcome the obstructive silence on the topic and promote the widest civil coexistence in society and the civil rights of

homosexual couples.

For over 15 years in Albania, the Italian Government has supported, through the commitment of the AICS Headquarters in Tirana, the Italian associations Cies and Cospe and UN Women, the three local associations that actively fight trafficking and violence against women, in Vlora, Elbasan and Scutari: Qendra Psiko-Sociale Vatra, Shoqata Tjeter Vizion and Gruaja tek Gruaja. Over 10,000 women, with their children, have received protection, psychoanalytic consultancy, professional training, grants and administrative support for social and economic reintegration through the opening of micro-enterprises and commercial activities. The elimination of violence against women is a strong and serious commitment of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, which in Albania has gone through and overcome very difficult moments in which the armed defense of anti-violence shelters was necessary.

In some cases, to protect girls and mothers whose lives were in danger, there was no other solution than changing their names and city of residence. Italy is and will keep on being there, till the elimination of violence, alongside the victims, no matter what name is or will be on the passport.

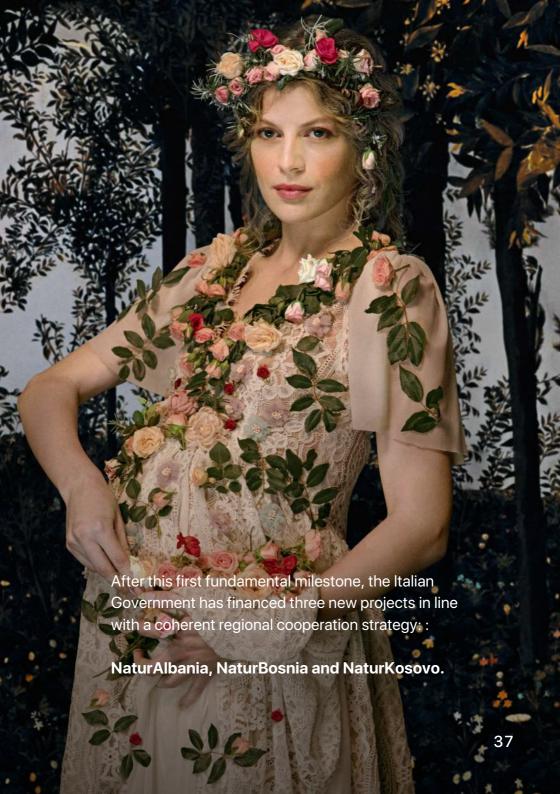


#### THE BEAUTY

Nature and culture represent a very close combination of values, the two sides of the same coin. This is the fourth bridge between the Governments of the Balkan Peninsula and Italy which, if built solidly, can successfully complete the path of full integration of the institutions and citizens of the Region into the European Union.

The commitment of the AICS Headquarters in Tirana to the environment began in 2015 with the implementation of an initiative financed by the European Union, Strengthening the Albanian national capacity in nature protection - preparation for the Natura 2000 network.

The initiative was concluded in 2019 and contributed in fact to the creation and sustainability of the Albanian National Agency for Protected Areas. Albania today has a new legislation, in line with European standards. Over 15% of its territory protected, with rangers trained and equipped from the North to the South of the Country. Visit the website akzm.gov.al for more information.



NaturAlbania is a project concluded in 2023, carried out in Skodra, Dajti, Divjake, Vlore, Llogara, Permet, with the Italian civil society organizations Vis, Celim and Cesvi and in collaboration with the University of Trento, the University of Genoa, the Polytechnic of Tirana and WWF. The activities have contributed to better protecting the Country's biodiversity, reviving the rural economy and supporting responsible tourism in protected areas. Some details: hydrometric sensors to record the water level of the Viosa River were installed in Permet and Narta, two shelters were built and handed over to the Regional Agency for Protected Areas in Bredhi i Hoteves. Training courses on HACCP certifications for local producers in the agri-food sector were held in Skodra, Dajti and Llogara. The underwater cultural heritage of the Bay of Vlore has been mapped and 360° underwater images of the PO Ship have been produced and installed in the new Multimedia Gallery of the Albania Italy Cooperation, Vision. A center for the protection of sea turtles has been built, also in Vlore, and 20 artificial coral reefs have been placed in the bay of Porto Palermo.

NaturBosnia is an ongoing initiative carried out in Sutjeska and Blidinje, with the Italian civil society organization CISP and in collaboration with Agenda 21, Abruzzo National Park, University of Perugia and ISPRA. The project, in line with the guidelines of the European Union on the sector, intends to create a model of economic and environmental enhancement of the territory, strengthening the Institutional capacity in biodiversity safeguard and integrated management of protected areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The intervention addresses the technical-administrative know-how of the managing bodies of the Blidinje Park Natural Area and the Sutjeska National Park, improving the local administration of natural resources, developing ecotourism services and raising awareness among local communities of the opportunities offered by the natural heritage. In addition to sharing management models and targeted infrastructural interventions, it is important to highlight that 20 proposals for grants to micro-enterprises and local associations have already been approved and new tourist packages have been designed and promoted.

NaturKosovo is an ongoing project, executed in Peja, Dejac and Junik, with the Italian civil society organizations Rtm and Celim and in collaboration with AITR, CAI, CNSAS and UTALAYA Foundation. The initiative intends to contribute to the sustainable tourism development of Kosovo by promoting cultural, historical and natural resources, creating job opportunities for new local generations, supporting micro-entrepreneurship, strenghtening local institutions in tourism governance and in the promotion of the Via Dinarica. The action plan is similar to the two previous initiatives. Also in this case, it is important to highlight the grants plan for micro-enterprises in the mountain tourism sector. Furthermore, among the activities, particular importance is given to training on the mountain rescue system for local guides and the establishment of a toll-free emergency number active 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The strategic commitment to culture and new creative industries is an innovative element in the action of the AICS headquarters in Tirana. The aim is to affirm culture as a development tool for new generations and strengthen the European identity of the citizens of the Balkan Peninsula.

On the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage, AICS Tirana is currently involved alongside the Albanian Government in defining the management plans for the archaeological park of Bylis and the development of the Benje area in the South of the Country. The 360 degree

3D reconstruction of the Bylis park has already been completed.

For the new creative industries, a new initiative was launched in 2023, Support for cultural policies, the development of creative industries and the promotion of human rights, which intends to contribute to the creation of a new hub of contemporary culture in Tirana, managed by Institutions and creative industries, together, on the Italian model of revitalization of abandoned or outskirts areas in cities such as Rome, Milan and Naples

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In 2023, the final architectural project of the new Ars Aevi Museum in Sarajevo was presented to the media. The new Museum will be built on the original model designed by Renzo Piano, thanks to a funding program promoted by Italy in collaboration with the European Union. It is precisely on culture and new creative industries that the AICS Headquarters in Tirana intends to focus strategically in the future, to contribute effectively to the European integration of the Region.





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