



## **WASTE REPORT for November 2, 2015**

### **U.S. Taxpayers Paying to Study Albanian Tourism**

Have you ever dreamed of a European vacation? Maybe you would like to check out England, France, Germany, or...Albania? Well, if you have not thought of spending your money on a trip to Albania, you might be surprised to learn the federal government is spending your tax dollars to study and promote the Albanian tourism industry.

That is right! The U.S. Agency for International Development is currently planning to award as much as **\$6 million as part of Tourism as a Leading Edge**, a joint venture with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, **for studies and work to improve tourism in Albania.**<sup>1</sup>

The problem, it seems, is that the Eurozone economic crisis is having a negative ripple effect on the Albanian economy which previously relied heavily on remittances of earnings abroad, particularly from Greece.

**To restart their economy, the Albanian government is hoping to capitalize on the country's tourism potential, but it is the U.S. taxpayer who is footing at least part of the bill.** Amazingly, tourism is already a major contributor to the Albanian economy. According to the grant description, tourism (in total) currently accounts for 17 percent of the nation's economy. By comparison, The World Travel and Tourism Council reports that tourism contributes 9.5 percent to the worldwide economy and 8.4 percent to the U.S. economy.<sup>2</sup> **This means Albania's tourism economy, as a percent of GDP, is already larger than the U.S.**

Meanwhile, the U.S. Treasury Department contributes approximately \$100 million to Brand USA, a joint public-private effort to promote the U.S. tourism industry by attracting foreign vacationers to America.<sup>3</sup> **In other words, one part of the federal government is working against another; one effort spending money to get foreign tourists to vacation in American, the other to get them to vacation in Albania. What next? Provide public housing to people who already own their own homes? Oh wait, we do that too.**

At the least, one must wonder: If this is a priority for the Albanian government, why is the U.S. taxpayer footing the bill?

## **Uncle Sam: "Come Visit the U.S. ...or go to Albania"**

<sup>1</sup> *Tourism as a Leading Edge*, Agency for International Development; Funding opportunity number: APS-182-16-000001

<sup>2</sup> *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014 United States*; World Travel and Tourism Council; London, United Kingdom; 2014

<sup>3</sup> *FY2016 Objectives, Summary Marketing Plan, & Budget*; Brand USA; Washington, D.C.; August 2015