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EUROPEAN TRAIL CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

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Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



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Europe is home to a vast network of hiking and cycling trails.

Trails and routes are a popular way for outdoor enthusiasts to explore Europe's natural landscapes.

In the context of further development of the Emblematic Mediterranean Mountains project, we are interested in exploring the certification systems, networks of routes or thematic groups of routes currently in force in Europe and their implementation potential.



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There are a variety of certification systems in place to ensure that these trails are accessible, safe and well-maintained.

These certification systems can also help hikers and cyclists choose routes that are appropriate for their skill level and interests.

We will focus on those at the European level.



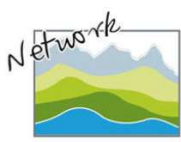
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Grande Randonnée System:

One of the most well-known trail certification systems in Europe is the **Grande Randonnée (GR)** system. This system was developed by the French Hiking Federation in the 1940s and has since expanded to cover much of Europe.

GR trails are marked with red and white stripes and are divided into multiple sections, each of which is typically a day's walk.

Bonne direction	
Tourner à gauche	
Tourner à droite	
Mauvaise direction	



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Grande Randonnée System:

There are currently over 60,000 kilometers of GR trails throughout Europe, and the system is maintained by national or regional hiking federations in each country.

The GR trails are a network of long-distance hiking trails in Europe, primarily passing through France, Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands.

Since these trails originated in France, the abbreviation is French and stands for (Sentier de) Grande Randonnée, which translates to “great hike” or “long-distance hike” in English.



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Grande Randonnée System:

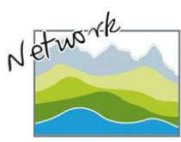
GR routes are labeled with numbers.

However, because the maintenance of the trails is managed by different organizations, this numbering does not follow a uniform standard. As a result, there are trails in different countries that bear the same number, but do not connect to each other.

Certain GR routes are included in the 12 European long-distance paths, also referred to as E-paths, each spanning thousands of kilometers.



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

Another popular trail certification system is the one managed by the **European Ramblers' Association (ERA)**. This system was established in 1969 and covers over 60,000 kilometers of long-distance hiking trails throughout Europe.

Certification is only available for complete trails. Prerequisite is a distance of at least 50 km with three daily stages. ERA trails are marked with yellow and black stripes and are divided into stages that are typically between 15 and 25 kilometers long.

<https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/>



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

The criteria system ‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ renders the attractiveness of routes measurable and guarantees a high quality walking experience.

The Leading Quality Trails are evaluated and certified by experienced hikers from European Ramblers Association and their member organisations, supported by Deutsche Wanderverband Service.



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

LQT-BE guarantee hikers can be sure that they will:

- walk along the best hikes in Europe,
- walk along natural paths,
- see impressive landscapes,
- pass through picturesque towns,
- pass cultural sights,
- not get lost on the trail because there is hiker friendly marking and distinct signposting,
- have continuous accessibility to the trail,
- be able to plan their walk from home in detail



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

The LQT-BE consist of 3 variants:

- [LQT-BE](#) are trails longer than 50 km.
- [LQT-BE, Day Walk](#) are trails for day hikes and are between 4 – 25 km.
- [LQT-BE, Region](#) are walking regions.



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

1.- **Leading Quality Trails** are certified after high standards set by ERA. The standards and certification ensure good experiences within beautiful nature, well marked trails, easy access, good logistics, well maintained websites and luggage transportation. All Leading Quality Trails are certified after the same strict standards by experienced walkers from ERA:



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

2.- Complementary there is the ‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe, **Day Walk**’, trails of 4 – 25 km length and are based on one of the themes:

Dream tour	is the classical Quality Day Walk
Cultural experience	has focus on a special criterion for cultural experience
Nature delight	has focus on a special criterion for natural experience
Family pleasure	is for families with children
Discover tour	is with special requirements for food and products
Comfortable hike	is for people with walking difficulties
Winter bliss	is designed for safe winter walking
Urban walk	is adapted to culture and trails in towns



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

Quality Day Walks must live up to certain criteria such as:

- Walk on natural soil and avoid composite pavement
- Avoid busy roads
- Walk through varying landscapes with a high experience factor
- Pass natural or cultural attractions
- Avoid intensively transformed environment
- Clear guidance for walkers is a must
- There is network management with signposts
- There is an easily recognizable starting point

To date there are only two Day Walk routes in operation in Luxembourg.



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

3.- ‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe, Region – abbreviated Leading Quality Region’ – guarantees a perfect hiking experience.

43 Criteria for the Leading Quality Region – Best of Europe:

- ✓ 13 criteria walking trail network/signposting
- ✓ 6 criteria host
- ✓ 10 criteria service for walkers
- ✓ 7 criteria Tourist Office
- ✓ 7 criteria organization



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‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe’ (LQT-BE):

Prior to being labeled as a Leading Quality Region, a few conditions must be met.

A Leading Quality Region is a region that:

- is totally dedicated to walking in terms of walking trail infrastructure, accommodation and services
- provides a variety of walking trips of at least 5 days
- is perceived by the guest as a closed region
- markets itself as a closed region
- appears as an organized structure
- has the support of its population for the issue of walking

To date, there is only one certified region in Luxembourg.



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The ERA also maintains a network of **European Long Distance Paths (ELDPs)**, which are even longer trails that cross multiple countries.

E-Paths are the European long distance trails which link the countries from North Cape to Crete and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Carpathians and the Black Sea.



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The E-Paths run on existing national or regional trails with the trails' own marking. However, it has been agreed to identify the E-paths also here and there with a uniform marking: a blue shield with the yellow stars of Europe, in the middle of which is the letter E and the corresponding number of the E-path.



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ERA recommends these Verified E-paths:

Austria				E4	E5	E6		E8		E10		
Baltic states									E9		E11	
Bulgaria			E3	E4				E8				
Croatia												E12
Czech Republic			E3			E6		E8		E10		
Denmark	E1					E6						
France		E2	E3	E4	E5		E7		E9			E12
Great Britain		E2						E8	E9			
Germany	E1		E3	E4	E5	E6		E8	E9	E10	E11	
Hungary			E3	E4			E7					
Ireland								E8				
Italy	E1											
Luxembourg		E2	E3									
Netherlands		E2						E8	E9		E11	
Norway	E1											
Poland			E3					E8	E9			
Portugal									E9			
Romania			E3									
Slovakia								E8				
Slovenia						E6	E7					E12
Spain			E3	E4			E7		E9			E12
Sweden	E1					E6						
Switzerland	E1	E2		E4	E5							



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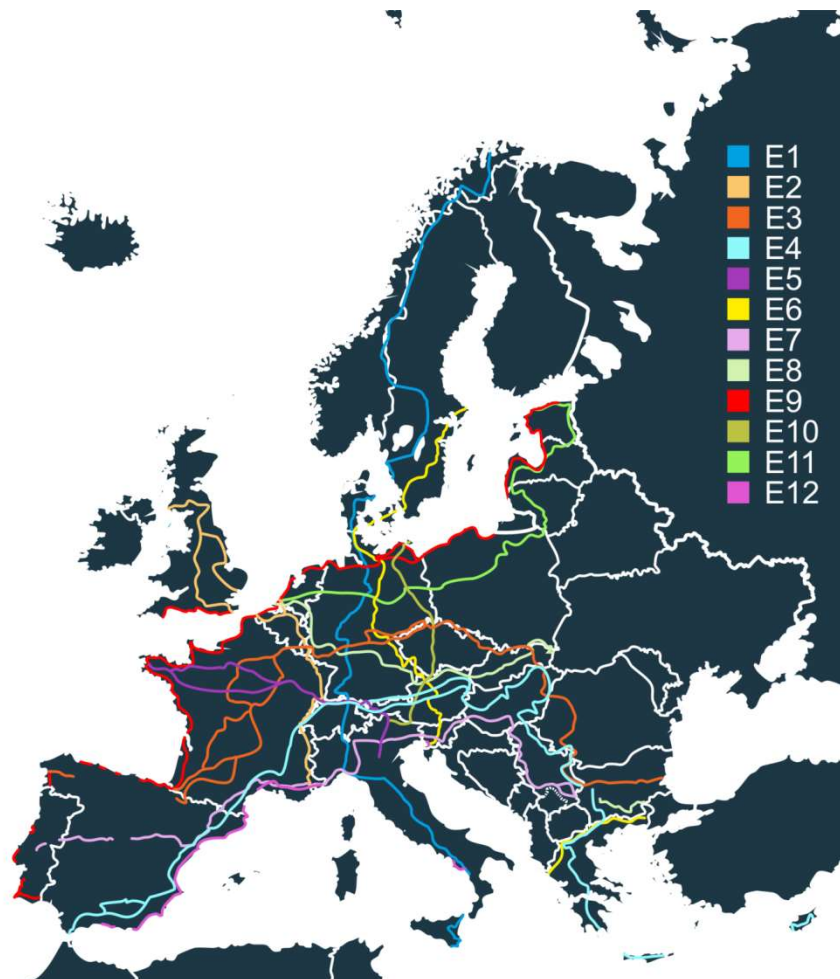
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ΑΝΑΤΥΞΙΑΚΗ Α.Ε. Ο.Τ.Α.



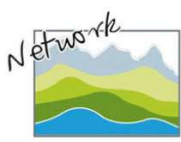
Agència de
Desenvolupament
del Berguedà



El Berguedà
terra de futurs



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EuroVelo system:

Certification systems for cycling routes also exist in Europe. **The EuroVelo system**, established in 1995, covers over 90,000 kilometers of cycling routes throughout Europe.

EuroVelo routes are divided into 17 different routes that cross multiple countries and are designed to be suitable for all levels of cyclists. The routes are marked with a green and white sign depicting a bicycle and the route number.

EuroVelo® is a registered trademark of the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF). (<https://en.eurovelo.com>)



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EuroVelo system:

The objectives the EuroVelo initiative are:



- To ensure the implementation of very high quality European-grade cycle routes in all countries of Europe, carrying the best European practice across borders and harmonising standards;
- To communicate the existence of these routes to decision makers and potential users, promote and market their use, and provide an important port of call for information about cycling in Europe;
- In this way, to encourage large numbers of European citizens to give cycling a try, and so to promote a shift to healthy and sustainable travel – for daily trips and as cycling tourism.



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EuroVelo system:

The development and operation of the EuroVelo routes is carried out by national, regional and local governments, commercial service providers and NGOs.

The aim is to establish an official National EuroVelo Coordination Centre (NECC) to lead on this work in every country through which EuroVelo routes pass.

Badge of Quality

EuroVelo is a registered trade mark of ECF, and only routes approved by ECF can be called EuroVelo. This is an important badge of quality for both the cyclist and the route promoter.



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EuroVelo system:



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European Certification Standard (ECS):

The European Certification Standard (ECS) is a unique and comprehensive methodology designed by ECF to assess the quality of cycle routes. It can be used to survey and assess the quality of national/regional routes, and to certify EuroVelo routes if the criteria are met. It can help set up national standards where they do not exist and harmonise the different regulations in the European states.



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European Certification Standard (ECS):

ECS is a successful methodology for route surveying, which consists of collecting data on infrastructure, services and communications using the dedicated ECS app. The survey enables a comprehensive assessment of the quality of cycle routes, and helps stakeholders to understand development needs and plan further investments. It also generates useful information for the end users.

When applied to EuroVelo routes, if the correct set of criteria are met, ECS can lead to routes becoming fully certified. "Certification" is the highest quality level on the EuroVelo network. Once achieved, certification is valid for five years.



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Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe:

Another certification system launched by the Council of Europe in 1987, are the **Cultural Routes** that demonstrate, by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared and living cultural heritage.

Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes>



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Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe:

Cultural Routes are evaluated regularly by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (EPA) and are certified by the Council of Europe based on:

- involve a theme that is representative of European values and common to at least three countries in Europe;
- be the subject of transnational, multidisciplinary scientific research;
- enhance European memory, history and heritage and contribute to interpretation of Europe's present-day diversity;
- support cultural and educational exchanges for young people;
- develop exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development;
- develop tourist products and services aimed at different groups.



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Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe:

The themes must satisfy all of the following criteria:

- Be representative of European values and common to at least three countries of Europe;
- Be researched and developed by groups of multidisciplinary experts from different regions of Europe so as to ensure that the activities and projects which illustrate it are based on consensus;
- Be illustrative of European memory, history, and heritage and contribute to an interpretation of the diversity of present-day Europe;



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Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe:

- Lend itself to cultural and educational exchanges for young people and hence be in line with the Council of Europe's ideas and concerns in these fields;
- Permit the development of initiatives and exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development;
- Lend itself to the development of tourist products in partnership with tourist agencies and operators aimed at different publics, including school groups;
- Be clearly reflected in the name of the cultural route; it must be concise and easily understandable.



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Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe:

Fields of action

Cultural routes must pertain to the following priority fields of action, while fulfilling the criteria enumerated below for each field of action:

1. Co-operation in research and development: projects must play a unifying role around major European themes and show how these themes are representative of European shared values;
2. Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage: projects must enhance tangible and intangible heritage, especially in lesser know areas, and explain their historical significance through Europe;



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Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe:

3. Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans: projects must organise activities with young people in order to promote the concept of European citizenship;

4. Contemporary cultural and artistic practice: projects must encourage activities and artistic practice which explore the links between their European theme and contemporary culture;

5. Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development: project must promote dialogue between urban and rural cultures, developed and disadvantaged regions, and between majority and minority. They must actively involve media and seek partnerships with tourism organisations to draw attention on their European heritage and be part of the sustainable territorial development.



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Conclusions:

1. There are several certification systems in Europe but not with a European vocation or ambition.
2. There are certifications provided by national or regional mountaineering organizations like Promenade et Randonnée (PR), Sender local (SL) or others but without having that European scope.
3. Both Grand Randonnée, E-Paths or the Euro Velo system are applicable to long distance trails but not to the characteristics of our itineraries.
4. Implementing a regional certification doesn't seem to be a convenient option in the dynamics of our project.
5. Among the existing certifications, few seem to be applicable or fit with the heterogeneous nature of our Emblematic Ecojourneys.



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Conclusions:

6. We have the option of certifying our Ecojourneys one by one or trying to certify the entire trail network.
7. We have to assume the possibility that some Ecojourneys may be certified and others may not.
8. The process of certification is not easy and entails a big effort and coordination between the members of the stakeholders representing the Emblematic Mountains network.
9. A strong commitment will be required on the part of the agents involved to obtain a certification.
10. Obtaining a certification can be a very important element for the recognition and dissemination of our itineraries.



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Recommendations:

Being realistic, two options seem to be feasible and implementable:

1. **‘Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe, Day Walk’**,
<https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/quality-day-walk/>
2. **Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe**
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/certification>



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Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe DAY WALK

Criteria – Overview

english



© European Ramblers Association europeanramblers.org

A region/organisation (tourist board, nature reserve, walking association, etc.) interested in obtaining the certificate "Leading Day Walk – Best of Europe" for marketing purposes contacts the European Ramblers Association (hereafter: ERA) to start the Quality assurance process.

ERA course

ERA offers a regional standard European training course for **national experts and local trail scouts**, who can gather the necessary data for the trail inventory. (The local interest groups involved in walking tourism (walking groups/associations, nature reserves, tourism, forestry, etc.) are requested to nominate up to a maximum of 8 and a maximum of 12 suitable and competent people for the training to become a local trail scout.

The cost of providing the **Standard two-day European training course** is: **2.800 € (excl. VAT) plus travel expenses for two trainers.**

A special discount for the standard training courses in 2024:
1.800 € (excl. VAT) plus travel expenses for two trainers.

Additional training courses:

- Combined three-day European training course: **3.600 € (excl. VAT), plus travel expenses for two trainers**
- Light (Review) one-day European training course: **1.900 € (excl. VAT), plus travel expenses for two trainers**

Certification

In general, trails with a length of 4 to 25 km can be submitted for certification. The cost of the certification procedure depends on the length of the day walk/trail:

4 to 7 km	= 1.000 € (applies to family-friendly/comfort hiking from 2 km)
8 to 11 km	= 1.100 €
12 to 15 km	= 1.200 €
16 to 20 km	= 1.300 €
21 to 25 km	= 1.500 €

All prices are excl. VAT plus travel expenses for the inspector.

A special discount for the first 10 trails!

Quantity discounts:

10% for 4 or more trails certified at the same time

15% for 8 or more trails certified at the same time



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Application for certification



Each year, the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (EPA) awards the certification "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" to cultural route network applicants fulfilling the criteria set out in Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Resolution CM/Res(2023)2.

The application process consists of the following steps:

1. Informing the EPA Secretariat of your interest in applying for certification by written letter (by 31st March, Year 0).
2. Preparing the application file (March-July, Year 0).
3. Attending a dedicated training seminar and advisory meeting organised by the Secretariat (May/June, Year 0).
4. Submitting a complete application by 31st July through a dedicated Council of Europe website (Year 0).
5. Replying to any additional requests for information from the independent expert (September – November, Year 0) and/or from the EPA Bureau (March-April, Year +1).
6. Presentation of the candidate network at the Cultural Routes Annual Advisory Forum (September/October, Year 0).
7. Audition at the EPA Governing Board meeting (Luxembourg - May, Year+1).
8. Notification of the final result of the application (June, Year+1).

Should your cultural route network be interested in applying for the "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" certification, we kindly ask you to inform the Secretariat by written letter in English or French to the attention of Mr. Stefano Dominioni, Executive Secretary of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe and Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, (By email to evaluation@culture-routes.lu) no later than 31st March.

A sample of the letter to be filled out by interested candidates is available [here](#). Upon reception of the letter, the Secretariat will acknowledge receipt of it and provide you with an editable certification form, instructions on how to submit your application and an invitation to a dedicated training seminar and an advisory meeting. Please note that the deadline for submitting all documentation as per decision by the Governing Board of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe is 31st July.

Applications for certification are composed of the following documents:

1. Certification form completed (Document 1);
2. Self-assessment grid completed (Document 2);
3. Declaration of Honour completed and signed (Document 3);
4. Updated legal statutes of the network;
5. Updated list of members of the network;
6. Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly meeting reports of the past three-years (if applicable);
7. Budget documents of the network (Current operational budget; financial information of the past three years; 3-year Budget forecast; Extra-budgetary funding);
8. 3-year Programme of activities forecast.

A [certification form template](#) can be downloaded [here](#).

A digital copy of the complete application must be submitted electronically via a dedicated Council of Europe website. Instructions on how to access and upload the documents to the platform will be sent to all applicants in due course. Documents shall be submitted in English or in French by **31st July**.

According to the Rules of Procedure of the EPA Governing Board, **only complete applications will be considered**. The Rules of Procedure also establish that: "An application by a candidate network may be submitted a maximum of three times. An application which has been denied certification by the Governing Board may be submitted again no earlier than 12 months following the date of the decision". Therefore, it is advisable to verify that all criteria for certification are met by the candidate network and that the evaluation file is complete before its submission.

The Secretariat should like to remind all applicants that all communication should be in either English or French. Documents, emails or other correspondence in other non-official languages will not be taken into account or processed.

For any questions or further information, please contact: evaluation@culture-routes.lu



Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης



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European Ramblers Association



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Guidelines for seeking funding of maintenance of trails.

<https://www.era-ewv-ferp.org/guidelines-for-seeking-funding-of-maintenance-of-trails/>



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Thank you!

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Με τη συγχρηματοδότηση της Ελλάδας και της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης