Invisible to the Eye, But Felt Strongly by the Heart

Media Literacy Matters
Art by the Danube
Strategies for Strengthening Democracy
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Cover photo: Fulbright | America for Bulgaria ETA in Vidin Jonah Blumenthal with one of his paintings

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Media literacy was the focus of many of Fulbright Bulgaria’s activities in Fall 2019—and with good reason. Although concerns about media freedom and the spread of fake news have been rising globally, the situation in Bulgaria is especially acute. Reporters Without Borders’ 2018 World Press Freedom Index ranks Bulgaria 111th out of 180 countries, the lowest ranking for an EU member-state. To help improve the Bulgarian media landscape and educate consumers, Fulbright Bulgaria has partnered with many other organizations to offer media literacy education to students and teachers alike and to encourage young Bulgarians to explore careers in media.

In July, Fulbright co-organized Bulgaria’s first Media Bootcamp for 20 high school students with local and international journalists. In September, we hosted a Fulbright International Seminar for students and faculty from across Europe and the US to discuss “Strategies for Strengthening Democracy” – of course, the media’s critical role featured prominently in these conversations. In November, we were honored to host 70+ Fulbright ETAs from Southeastern Europe for the second year in a row. Representatives of Newseum, the Central European University and leading Bulgarian NGOs shared engaging ways for ETAs to introduce media literacy themes into their English classes.

Thank you to all our partners and supporters who helped make these seminars so successful! We look forward to continuing our media literacy work with both our American and Bulgarian Fulbrighters.

Best,
Angela
“Strategies for Strengthening Democracy: 30 Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall” was the topic of the Fulbright International Seminar that took place in Sofia, Sept. 24-30, 2019. It was sponsored by the State Department (ECA) and organized by the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, with the support of the US Embassy in Bulgaria.

We hosted a stellar group of lecturers and diplomats and outstanding, motivated seminar participants from the following countries: the US, Bulgaria, the UK, Ukraine, Romania, Germany, Portugal, Canada, the Netherlands and Greece. Academics, policy makers, political scientists and representatives of the civil society and the religious denominations discussed the issues of “captured/facade” democracy, judicial reform, informational security, social cohesion and empathy. Brainstorming, learning and exchanging ideas, the participants formed a comprehensive view of the
current challenges and solutions, facing democratic development of the region 30 years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

The opening day placed the post-communist transition into historical perspective with keynote speakers Dr. Damian Valdez (Cambridge University) and Prof. Evgeniy Dainov (NBU). Their outline of the historical tensions, underlying the appearance and decline of communist ideology set the stage for the discussion to follow. Their theoretical presentations were counterpointed by a walking tour highlighting the traces of socialism lingering in Sofia. Over the next five days, participants engaged in intense discussions with panels of experts on topics ranging from façade democracy, disinformation, empathy, and social cohesion to justice; they also developed their own policy ideas in hands-on workshops that addressed themes including “The Future of Democracy,” “Manipulation of Public Opinion,” “Fund-Raising for Charities” and “Social Inclusion and Community Building.” There was time in the program for exploration as well, as the group took a day-trip to the 2019 cultural capital of the EU, Plovdiv and attended lectures devoted to the situation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church during communism and to current Orthodox communities’ revival through charity activities and pilgrimage.

A major highlight of the seminar was a brief address and open Q&A session with prominent US diplomat John Beyrle, who shared memories of his service as ambassador to Bulgaria and Russia and emphasized the importance of consistency on the path of democracy. The graduation ceremony on Sept 29 was a celebration not only of newly acquired knowledge, but also of newly formed friendships and academic collaborations. We would like to thank all lecturers, participants, and supporters for their commitment!
From June 30 to July 7, 2019, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, the Association of European Journalists-Bulgaria (AEJ), and the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) organized a “media bootcamp” for high school students. The goal was to educate students to be smart media consumers and to equip them with professional journalistic and digital skills. The project was generously funded by a grant from the US Embassy in Bulgaria and supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation (ABF).

The week-long camp was the culmination of a year of intensive Fulbright-AEJ media literacy activities that included media training of Fulbright ETAs and the development of media literacy materials for the classroom and for school clubs. The camp served as a reward for the best student-journalists who had contributed throughout the year to the newly launched nationwide...
platform for youth journalism, sCool
Media, funded by the ABF. The
camp generated strong interest,
attracting more than 75 applicants;
twenty high school students from
13 cities around the country were
selected to attend the bootcamp on
the AUBG campus.

H.E. Ambassador Eric Rubin gave
an opening speech at the event,
together with AUBG’s president,
Dr. David Evans. Nancy Schiller,
president of the America for
Bulgaria Foundation also visited the
camp. The program also featured
three international speakers: Simon
Adler, Radiolab producer; BBC News
YouTube Editor Marko Zoric; and
Robin Brinkworth, from the UK’s The
Student View. Along with more than
a dozen Bulgarian journalists and
media experts, they spoke about
debunking disinformation online
and helped students brainstorm
and refine their own original media
project ideas. Participants split into
teams, and using AUBG’s state-of
the-art cameras and media labs and
the lecturers’ expert guidance, they
developed articles, interviews, video
reports, and a podcast. At the final
project presentations judges Irina
Nedeva, AEJ President and Senior
Producer at Bulgarian National
Radio; Kalin Dimtchev, Country
Manager Bulgaria, Microsoft; and
Mario Grachenov, a Public Relations
Specialist at the US Embassy
awarded prizes for the most
impressive projects, which included
investigative video reports about
underage drinking and unknown
cultural heritage sites, as well as
interviews with local residents
about their opinion about the news.

The positive response from the
local media and the participants
themselves was so overwhelming
that we plan to offer a second camp
in the future. Fulbright Bulgaria
would like to thank all of our
partners who made this incredible
initiative possible!
Bulgarian Teachers Explore Best Practices in Media Literacy Education: The Fulbright TEA Program

by Maria Kostova

In 2019-20 four Bulgarian high-school teachers took part in the Fulbright Teaching Excellence and Achievement Media Literacy Program for the first time. The awards are administered by ECA/IREX with the support of the US Embassy in Bulgaria and the Fulbright Commission. Mariya Stoyanova from Academic Lyudmil Stoyanov Foreign Language School – Blagoevgrad, Elina Ivanova from 119 Academic Mihail Arnaudov Secondary School – Sofia, Elitsa Bileva from Georgi Izmirliev Secondary School – Gorna Oryahovitsa, and Suzan Ferhadova from Vasil Levski High School – Ruse visited Kent State University for a six-week training. The program brought international secondary-level teachers from around the world to the United States to take academic seminars, observe, share their expertise, and develop action plans to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills in their home schools, and communities. All participants have begun enthusiastically applying their newly acquired knowledge in their home institutions.

Here is what Suzan Farhadova, who now is putting her experience to good use as an expert in the Ruse Regional Department of Education, has to share:

“I would like to thank the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission for the chance to participate in the FTEA Spring Cohort. In those six weeks, we learned a lot about American culture and the educational system. Thanks to the Kent State University team and our professors there, we learned about new teaching methodologies, ICT implementation in education, as well as media literacy and critical thinking skills. We were able to develop and demonstrate technological, general academic and media literacy projects, while I had the chance to present my media literacy project at the End of Program Workshop in Washington D.C. The topic of my presentation was ‘Media Literacy and Critical Thinking: Fundamental Skills.’

“The TEA Program was full of challenges, joys and experiences. We have built long-lasting friendships with our partner-teachers, colleagues and school teams. I had field experience with an American partner-teacher at
Streetsboro High School, where I conducted observations, Bulgarian cultural presentations and Media Literacy Teaching lessons. This was an enriching experience for me and I feel fortunate to have had the chance to work with such an amazing school team, full of enthusiasm and professionalism.

“We visited beautiful places such as an Amish school and community, Niagara Falls, Cleveland, Columbus, New York, Washington, but of course, Kent is my favorite place — due to the Kent State team, the professors who cared about us, taught us with patience and support, and became our KSU family. We also had the chance to become a family at Kent and meet our host families there.

“Despite the global emergency situation, I had a smooth trip home in mid-March. Now, returning to my home country, my family and my work at the Regional Department of Education, I feel inspired. I have already taken some steps towards implementing what I have learned: I started with creating events on teacher platforms, such as eTwinning, where we share education technologies, as I think in these difficult times Bulgarian teachers are struggling in their use of online classroom technologies. In addition, I have planned a collaboration with my foreign language expert colleagues from other Regional Departments to organize teacher trainings on the topics of Education Technologies and Media Literacy Courses. I also help teacher colleagues with distance learning, when they have questions or need support.

“My second implementation plan is more challenging. If I have the opportunity, I would like to participate and assist in the development of school education policies. After taking part in the Fulbright TEA Program, I am convinced that Media Literacy and Critical Thinking should be taught as independent subjects at school, as they are fundamental skills. Our children should be literate on how to be safe online, how to counter misinformation, fake news, bias, differentiate types of media, and be effective citizens.

As a whole, I believe that my participation in the FTEA Media Literacy Program was a life-changing experience.”
Teaching Media Literacy in the Classroom:
Fulbright ETAs Learn the “Tricks” of the Trade

by Iliana Dimitrova

The second annual ETA seminar on Media Literacy hosted by the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission took place on Nov 7-10, 2019, in Sofia. The seminar gathered more than 80 Fulbright English Teaching Assistants from South Eastern Europe and Malta, all eager to learn more about how to help their students be better media consumers, discuss current events, share best ESL practices, and learn more about each other and their varying ETA placements.

On the day of their arrival, all ETAs were welcomed by HE Herro Mustafa, the newly arrived ambassador of the United States to Bulgaria, who hosted a reception in her residence. The event was an opportunity for the guests to mingle with Bulgarian colleagues and meet representatives of the Bulgarian NGO sector, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, and journalists. They were greeted with short speeches by HE Ambassador Mustafa, America for Bulgaria Foundation President Nancy Schiller, and Denitsa Sacheva, Deputy Minister of Education and Science.

Over the two days of the seminar, ETAs participated in various media- or ESL-themed lectures and workshops. Dean Starkman, a lecturer at the Central European University and senior editor at the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, delivered some startling data and shared his concerns about the future in a keynote speech titled “Structural Challenges to Public Interest Journalism.” Barbara McCormack, Vice President of Education at Newseum, delivered workshops on teaching media literacy and responding to misleading media. The workshops were packed with activities aimed at identifying and responding to fake news, which could easily be applied in the context of a high school or university classroom.
In addition to methodology and media, the seminar delved into another important theme – diversity and inclusion. The discussion was led by Courtney Moffett-Bateau, Diversity Liaison, and Susanne Hamscha, Diversity Coordinator with the European Fulbright Diversity Initiative. After all this hard work, the two-day seminar concluded with a hugely successful Fulbright Party and Talent Show, which saw many of the participants and guests take the stage to perform musical numbers and stand-up comedy, sometimes on a last-minute whim!

The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission would like to thank the State Department’s Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs for their generous support for this event. We would also like to thank our fellow Fulbright Commissions and US Embassies in the region who “lent” us their ETAs for the weekend. We look forward to continuing the important work of improving media literacy and countering disinformation in South Eastern Europe through future joint initiatives!
On January 16-18, 2020, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission conducted its annual midyear conference for US grantees, “100 Days in Bulgaria.” Fulbright scholars and students had 15 minutes to briefly introduce their projects in diverse fields such as genetics, philosophy, archaeology, anthropology, water management, and music (flute and piano). We again enjoyed an “ETA Film Festival” featuring 32 two-minute videos about the ETAs’ life and work in Bulgaria, played one after another under dimmed lights for a true cinematic experience!
The conference weekend offered professional development training for the young assistant-teachers, as well as a team-building event for the scholars and student-researchers at Sofia Bread House. English Language Fellow Scott Farmer, based in Sliven, led interactive and entertaining workshops for the ETAs on lesson planning and diversifying lesson content, while Regional English Language Officer Kevin McCaughey taught ETAs how to make the best use of their Activate Games packets – a collection of teaching materials provided by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The midyear conference was honored by a strong group of representatives of the America for Bulgaria Foundation, which has been the main sponsor of the program for English teaching assistants in Bulgaria since 2010, including Gail Buyske, Board member; Nancy Schiller, President; Desislava Talikova, Executive Director; Natalia Miteva, Program Director, Developing and Retaining Human Capital, and others. The Fulbright Commission would like to thank the ABF team for their support of the ETA program and other Fulbright initiatives.

The highpoint of the weekend was the Fulbright Talent Show, which featured over 20 performances by Bulgarian and American Fulbrighters and alumni, as well as board and family members. From classical music, rap, poetry recitals, lip sync battle and performances on piano, flute, ukulele, tambura and kaval – our Fulbrighters displayed many talents and our supportive audience enjoyed all of them. The evening of celebration also collected some donations in support of the Alumni Top-Up Fellowship, which will help fund the travel of one Bulgarian grantee to the U.S. Congratulations to all our grantees on their successful work this past semester!
In this interview we would like to introduce Jonah Blumenthal, an English Teaching Assistant at the “Tsar Simeon Veliki” Secondary School in Vidin, in AY 2018-2019. Jonah came to Bulgaria with a lot of international experience under his belt, passion for the visual arts, and commitment to service. This fall he is continuing his education at Harvard Medical School.
You are a person with a multitude of talents and interests – would you like to share with our wider audience what skills, in addition to teaching, did you teach and learn while on your Fulbright?

While in Bulgaria I also got to teach photography. This is one of my personal passions and it was an absolute joy to be able to impart that on some of my wonderful students. While in Bulgaria I made it a point to learn film photography, and further develop my own painting skills. I also learned how to knit and how to play the kaval. Bulgaria was a wonderful opportunity to not only teach but to learn!

You recently moved to Boston to pursue your dream of becoming a physician at the Harvard Medical School – what did it take for you to be where you’re at in your life right now?

This is a great question. Getting to Harvard was a long journey and there were and continue to be so many important people who helped me to get here. I really credit my parents, high school teachers, and my college friends and mentors for helping me to develop as a person. They supported me when I needed it and pushed me when they knew I could take it. I am here because of them. Specifically while in college I volunteered as a nighttime homeless outreach worker. I spent hundreds of hours working alongside and helping people who were previously or currently experiencing homelessness. Selfishly I don’t think I could have spent this time in any better way. I grew so much and really developed as a person from those nights. I met some very important people who really mentored me while I was an undergraduate. I also want to recognize that having the privilege of being on a Fulbright certainly helped! There is no way that I would be at Harvard Medical School without this past year.

What lies ahead for you? In an ideal world, where would you like to be in 10 years’ time?

In ten years I hope that I am doing something that I love, surrounded by people that I love (and who ideally love me too). I hope that I am able to help people in a profound way. In an ideal world I would be able to maintain my passion for the visual arts as well. I really have no idea what specialty I will go into, but I hope that I am serving, and advocating for those populations who have traditionally been excluded or denied access to healthcare whether in the United States or abroad.

Here you can see some of the photos and paintings created by Jonah during his stay in Bulgaria: www.jonahblumenthalart.com
Nellie, you are a true “living bridge” between Bulgarian and American cultures – what first sparked your interest in the US?

It’s impossible to pick out a particular thing or moment that “sparked” my interest in the US, my first introduction to American culture was at the age of 13, when in the summer of 1973, I arrived in New York City with my parents, who at that time were posted to work for the Commercial Section of the Bulgarian mission to UN. I am forever grateful to my parents that...
they made a decision to enroll me in a local public school, Wagner Junior High School, for a full three years. As one might imagine, for an adolescent girl coming from a country “behind the iron curtain” and enrolling into a public school in New York City, there were so many new and different wonderful, yet complicated and challenging experiences, that made a profound impact and memories on my life. One significant example from that time is how the school embraced students of different background and culture. Wagner JHS provided tutoring in English for students like me, who didn’t speak the language, with volunteer teachers. I am truly grateful to Wagner for its way of treating students, regardless of where they came from or who their parents were. The important factor was education. In general anything that I’ve experienced while living in New York City at that period was uniquely new and educational. That personal relationship I developed with NYC continued later in my life, when in 1979 I had another chance to return to the United States and attend Hunter college getting my undergraduate degree in Art History, where almost all of the art classes were held in front of masterpieces in the city’s museums. This is the time when I became enchanted by the museums of New York and in particular the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This was the beginning of a spiritual “love affair” – the museums were my temples. I consider that encounter truly fortunate.

How were you able to put your experience with US museum studies to good use upon your return to Bulgaria?

Upon returning to Bulgaria in 1983, the transition was really challenging at that time. I couldn’t just immediately go out, present my US BA diploma and apply for a job. This was the period of the Cold War between the East and the West. It took me more than a year and a half before I could find a job. Having lived and studied in the United States was looked upon as importing “capitalist propaganda,” not a welcoming factor at that time. However, with the help of good friends and sincere intentions eventually I began working as a museum guide at the then newly opened Ludmila Zhivkova National Foreign Art Gallery, now Square 500. I liked my work as a guide then, because it gave me a chance to be again in “my temple” – the museum. There were many visiting school groups and individual visitors, and also I was in constant contact with foreign visitors. Being an English-language guide, work was always interesting, intriguing and a life of discovery. I enjoyed my role as a “host” at the museum, interpreting the art, applying my knowledge about it by interacting with the visitors of all ages and all different places. In the process of showing the artworks and the exhibits, as a Bulgarian presenting them in English it made me feel like I was connecting different cultures. During my work there, I was exposed to many visitors of the entire sector of the society. The fact is that as an English-language guide I conducted many tours for different groups of visitors of the diplomatic embassies in Sofia, this is how I first met representatives of the US Embassy. In my capacity of a museum professional who spoke English and having lived in America, I had to work closely with the cultural section of the US embassy for an exhibition which in 1988 was presented under a bilateral relationship between Bulgaria and the USA. That exhibition was color lithographs from the Tamarind Art Institute of Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was a very successful mutual event for the Gallery and its public. That work contact I made with the USIS section of the embassy later had a professional impact on my desire to pursue museum studies. In the autumn of 1989, I attended a month-long program for museum specialist in the USA. It was organized by the USIA, and together with a group of other museum professionals of eight different countries, we traveled through several major American cities to see museums and galleries and meet with the American colleagues, to talk and exchange views and opinions – it was a fascinating and stimulating international exchange program. The times were exciting – I was in Phoenix,
Arizona, when together with that group we watched the fall of the Berlin Wall on CNN. It was unbelievable what we watched on the screen!

You began working in the Bulgarian museum sector during the socialist period. How did Bulgarian museums differ then from what you had seen in the US?

That’s a very complicated question. Times and history were different of the Bulgarian society. Most visits to museums or national memorials, homes of prominent artists or writers, and national heroes’ homes, at the time when I was a student in elementary and middle school in Bulgaria were organized by schools. Growing up in Bulgaria I naturally visited a lot of those memorial “house-museums.” The difference is that during that time, these museums did not have interactive programs, so-called “hands on” or anything that involved the children – students were expected to simply look and listen. It was a passive and honestly boring experience sometimes, especially for young visitors.

While living in the United States, I witnessed in person interactive educational programs in art museums. It is amazing how interesting and educational a single work of art, to say nothing of a whole collection, could be, even for the youngest audiences – that inspired me to continue my museum education and go further into it. What impressed me most about US museums back then were the interactive educational programs for children of all ages. That is why I decided that my research at NYU would be dedicated to ways of implementing educational programs in Bulgarian museums. More specifically, comparing the two different personal experiences - in Bulgarian museums and American ones, I aimed to design an art education program for the International Gallery of Art in Sofia, where I used to work. Such programs did not exist then in Bulgaria – the teachers used to bring children only to look at the exhibition and leave, no interaction, whatsoever!

Today thankfully it is very different – for example, I have heard about museums in Russe and Plovdiv that have very strong interactive educational programs.

How did you learn about the Fulbright program?

That’s also a long personal story. The first time I met a Fulbright fellow was actually a Bulgarian in NYC when I was a student at Hunter. That Fulbrighter was Prof. Pavlina Dokovska, who was then a student of piano at Juilliard. We became good friends. Later when I was working at the cultural section of the US Embassy in Sofia in the early 1990s, truly historic times, I met many US Fulbright fellows coming to Bulgaria. That was also the time when the Fulbright Commission was beginning to be established in Sofia. My involvement with that process as well as many other work-related assignments was fascinating, another enjoyable, learning experience because it was a very positive and optimistic time of building relationships and strengthening understanding between the two cultures. I was truly convinced that in my work duties, I was a living bridge between Bulgaria and the US – it is something invisible to the eyes but I felt it so strongly in my heart, and continue to feel that way today! It’s impossible to separate one’s private life from professional engagements – look how we are learning to do that today in these complicated times of COVID-19.

While working at the Embassy, during this stimulating time of social change, I was also a young mother and a wife. Work and family life are always so intertwined. A sudden tragedy in the family can have an impact in numerous ways. My first husband died unexpectedly. My private and professional life were subjected to significant change. I was faced with chaos and a mountain of unpredictability! At moments like that, life continues and who knows what inspires or influences one’s decision and actions?

This is the time I dared to entertain the idea of applying for a Fulbright scholarship. I had to resign from my job at the embassy because of the conflict of interest. I applied to NYU’s museum and galleries arts administration master’s program. For the Fulbright program, my application essay presented a vision of establishing a cultural institution in Bulgaria based on the model of the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts), which would support the visual arts and adopt best practices from the museum tradition of the US. In the summer of 1994, my daughter Mila and I arrived in NYC to start my academic program. It was another life-testing period – a time of stimulating hard work and building new memories!

During the summer of my first year as a Fulbrighter, I had a chance to do an internship with the Open Society Institute in NYC. I continued working later there and implemented my NYU thesis as a pilot project. It was presented to Open Society Institute-Sofia and the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts (SCCA), and the program TransArt or “Transcending Borders through Art” in Bulgaria began at the National Gallery for Foreign Art in Sofia. Based on that project, a true three-way partnership was formed: between the Sixth Elementary School Graf Ignatiev, SCCA, and the National Art Gallery for Foreign Art. The program was very new and captivating, a real precedent for that time. It involved a series of student visits to the exhibition halls, talks with
Students in the TransArt workshop (Photo Credit: Krassimir Krustev)

The artists in front of the art objects, and afterwards students creating their own art work for an exhibition.

This project was very successful. It was presented in other countries which were part of the OSI network. TransArt was adapted according to the museums in these countries. We will need more time if I’m to describe the process of this implementation—maybe in a second interview!

In New York City, it seems you also found a life partner who shares your passion for education!

Yes, as I said earlier, life is life—the private goes along hand-in-hand with the professional. I met my future husband Bob Gipson and at the time when we got married in 2001, he had already founded the family Tianaderrah Foundation, dedicated to education, history preservation and conservation. It was natural for me to embrace and get involved with the family foundation and for Bob to fall in love with Bulgaria. Through the foundation and personal friendships, we became very much involved with educational and cultural projects in the country. One of the foundation’s first involvement in Bulgaria was providing a donation to acquire secure museum cases for displaying precious ancient artifacts at the Archeological Museum in Sofia. At that time we met and worked with Professor Vassil Nikolov. We became very good friends and now through the support of the Tianaderrah foundation we continue to be involved with another project under his leadership—the Neolithic site Solnicite (saltworks) in Provadia. Another long-standing partnership is with Michael Tachev, the executive director of SS Cyril and Methodius foundation. We established scholarships for high school students who want to continue their education at Bulgarian universities. Michael and his team have been excellent partners in running that project for more than 15 years now! Bob and I enjoy so much meeting with the students who receive these scholarships when we visit Sofia.

Another educational institution very dear to our hearts is the American College of Sofia! It has its own special history for many Bulgarians and Americans! It is the oldest American educational institution in Bulgaria, established in the 1860s. Another life story that deserves its own time and place for interview, perhaps. Currently I’m a trustee on the board of ACS. I stay in touch with many alumni who come to the US to study, as well as with alumni who work and live in Sofia. Bob and I have welcomed many of them to our home in the States.

Are you still actively involved in museum education?

I continue my interest in museums and art both in Bulgaria and the US. For more than 15 years I have been a volunteer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I’m also professionally involved with the Institute of the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW), which is affiliated with NYU. And I’m a trustee on the board of the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, NY.

What was the greatest impact of your Fulbright experience?

I’m so grateful to The Fulbright Program. It is a life-changing factor. It helped me fulfill my dreams about making a difference for museums in Bulgaria. I consider education to be one of the strongest components of a person’s character, the Fulbright experience helped me focus on that—education is a work-in-progress for life, it keeps the spirit young! I hope I have passed that on to my daughter and now to keep it going to my grandsons. I am looking forward to future work with Fulbright, supporting Bulgarian students! Thank you for your interview.

Fulbright Bulgaria thanks Robert and Nellie Gipson for their generous support of the first annual Fulbright Alumni Scholarship!
**Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees**

**Academic Year 2019-2020**

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**GRADUATE STUDENTS**

- **Denitsa Vidolova**
  - Columbia University, Teachers College – MA International and Comparative Education

- **Stela Gavrilova**
  - Cornell - Johnson School, One Year MBA

- **Stoimen Iliev**
  - Cornell - Johnson School, One Year MBA

- **Rumen Cholakov**
  - Columbia University, Columbia Law School, Master of Laws (LL.M)

- **Olga Ouzunova**
  - Fordham University – MA in Public Media

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**VISITING SCHOLARS**

- **Hristomir Yordanov – Telecommunications**
  - Home Institution: Technical University
  - Host Institution: University of California—Berkeley
  - Project Title: High Gain Integrated Millimeter Wave and Terahertz Antennas

- **Mira Arsova-Tzvetkova – Special Education**
  - Home Institution: Sofia University
  - Host Institution: CUNY-Hunter College, New York
  - Project Title: Development of Social Skills and Social Competences, and Managing Challenging Behaviors in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) through Different Educational Strategies, Approaches and Therapies

- **Mihail Todorov – Mathematics**
  - Home Institution: Technical University, Sofia
  - Host Institution: San Diego State University, CA
  - Project Title: Soliton Dynamics of Nonlinear Integrable and Nonintegrable Systems

- **Elena Stoykova – Optics**
  - Home Institution: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
  - Host Institution: University of Dayton, OH
  - Project Title: Computer Generation of Holograms for Holographic Imaging and Coherent Optical Metrology

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**VISITING RESEARCHERS**

- **Atanas Pekanov – Economics**
  - Home Institution: Austrian Institute of Economic Research
  - Host Institution: Harvard University, Department of Economics
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  - Project Title: Application of the Drude Polarisable Force Field to Green Organics Solvent - Ecotoxicology and Environmental Safety

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  - Project Title: Computer Generation of Holograms for Holographic Imaging and Coherent Optical Metrology

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  - Host Institution: Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
  - Project Title: A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED (Best Practices in Conducting Advocacy Campaigns)

- **Yana Buhrer Tavanier – Civil Society Development**
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  - Project Title: Human Right Innovation in the Context of Shrinking Civil Space
U.S. Fulbright Grantees
Academic Year 2019-2020

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Home Institution: Consortium for Access to Justice, Soquel, CA
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Host Institution in Bulgaria: Balkan Heritage Foundation, Sofia

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Project Title: Exploring Artistry: Epistemologies of Flute Performance and Pedagogy in Bulgaria
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The Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy in Varna

by Vaptsarov Naval Academy Staff

In this edition of our Partner in Focus section, it is our pleasure to present one of the most renowned military schools in Bulgaria - an innovative, reliable and dynamic partner: Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy, based in Varna.

Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy is the oldest technical educational institution in the Republic of Bulgaria. Its history, past and present achievements make it the most prestigious center for the training of maritime specialists in the country. An excursion into its history shows how it changed and adapted to the demands and challenges of changing times. Founded in 1881 in Rousse by the Ministry of War of the Principality of Bulgaria as a Maritime School, it was established to train machinists and technicians for the purposes of the fleet. Serving the need of the recently liberated country for self-defense and self-assertion, the school offered courses for sub-officers, including specializations as boatswains, ratings, artillerymen, miners, and machinist mates. Soon, another dimension was added to the Maritime School: it was moved to the seaport town of Varna and the new emphasis on engineering was reflected in the name of the institution. In 1910, the first building specially designed for the needs of the Engineering School to His Majesty’s Fleet was built in Varna.

In the Balkan Wars and World War I (1912-1918), graduates of the Training Unit participated in mine laying and minesweeping operations, the attack against the Ottoman cruiser Hamidiye, the assault operations in Balchik, Kavarna and Kaliakra, and the Engagement of Balchik on 13 December 1916. They had the honor of mastering new naval equipment: seaplanes and the first Bulgarian submarine. After the wars, the maritime education system underwent another reorganization. Shipmaster Courses and Fishermen School (oriented towards commercial shipping companies) appeared. In 1942, with a royal decree, the Maritime School received the status of specialized higher maritime school and the name His Majesty’s Naval School. In the period 1945-1946, the school was called “Naval People’s School to the Maritime Forces,” and from 1946-1949 – “The People’s Naval School.” In 1949, the Naval School adopted as its patron Nikola Vaptsarov, a poet and graduate of the school from the Class of 1926, and took the name N. Y. Vaptsarov People’s Naval School.

In 1954, the school moved into its present facility, and in 1960, it was entered in the registers of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to the UN, which recognized its diplomas before all ship owners in the world. In 2001, with a decision of the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation to the Council of
Ministers, it received full accreditation as a university.

Currently, the Naval Academy is the home of 3,000 students (110 cadets and 2,890 civilians), 247 faculty and staff (military and civilian). It sets as its mission to develop highly qualified leaders for the Bulgarian Navy and the maritime industry; to prepare them for the challenges of the transforming Navy and the rapidly changing sector of the global maritime economy. As the leading institution in maritime training, the Academy concentrates on: integrated training of midshipmen to receive simultaneously bachelor’s degrees in Military Affairs and in the maritime or IT professional field; training students to receive bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the fields of maritime or IT; PhD degrees in accredited doctoral programs; training for raising the qualification level of maritime personnel; performing activities for research and innovation and applied research. In addition to fundamentals in seamanship, navigation, communications, naval weapons and leadership, each summer, midshipmen and students participate in professional training in order to gain experience and be exposed to their possible job opportunities upon graduation in the Navy, the merchant marine and the marine industry.

To meet the increasing demand for security of information flows and technologies related to the use of space systems, recently NVNA started training programs in Information and Communication Technologies and Cybersecurity at bachelor’s and master’s levels in the newly opened professional field of Communication and Computer Engineering.

In terms of international cooperation, NVNA participates in NATO and European Union-funded joint projects with Romanian and Polish Naval Academies and the Piri Reis Maritime University of Istanbul, Turkey. It takes part in short-term mutual training programs or conferences with counterparts from Romania, Poland, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, Slovakia, Netherlands, Norway, United States and Ukraine. Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy is also a co-founder of BSAMI (the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions).

The Fulbright Commission appreciates the opportunity to present annually its research and study programs for Bulgarian citizens in the US to the students and staff of the Naval Academy. Thanks to the kind cooperation of Adm. Prof. D.Sc Boyan Mednikarov (Rector of the NVNA), Capt. Prof. Nikolay Velikov (Head of International Relations) and Prof. Kiril Tenekedzhiev (a Fulbright alum and faculty at NVNA), Fulbright Executive Director Angela Rodel and Program Officer for Bulgarian grantees Maria Kostova have had the opportunity to discuss future short- and long-term specialization exchanges in the fields of cybersecurity and informational technologies. The Fulbright graduate study grants are also of interest to the MA students in the civilian specializations of maritime logistics and IT management. The Commission keeps the doors open to applicants from the Academy and is ready to assist in US specialist and scholar visits to NVNA.

We are still at the beginning of our common journey, but every visit to the Varna Naval Academy is a reminder of the quality and integrity of Bulgarian higher education, and an inspiration for further cooperation.
Access to Justice: The First Legal Incubator in Bulgaria

by Rada Kaneva

Bulgaria’s first legal incubator formally launched on Friday, December 6, 2020. The basic concept of the incubator is simple: lawyers who want to serve low-income people often need help getting community-based practices up and running. Incubators provide that help through subsidized office space, resources, trainings and consultations for business and legal skills development.

Fulbright scholar Fred Rooney played a main role in the creation of the first incubator of this kind in Bulgaria (first for Eastern Europe, too!) Fred is called the “father of incubators” by the American Bar Association for his work to advance the legal incubator movement in the United States. Through his work, he has helped law students and early career attorneys develop the practical skills to set up law practices while providing affordable legal services to the underserved. Through the Fulbright Program, Rooney took this idea out of the US, working with institutions in the Dominican Republic, Pakistan, and, most recently, Bulgaria.

“When I found out there were incubators for bakeries and graphic designers, I asked myself why there were none for lawyers,” said Rooney. “Worldwide, legal education is purely theoretical and lacks practical knowledge. At the same time, 80% of people in the United States cannot afford legal aid, and the situation in Bulgaria is not much different. The model is designed to serve the needs of low-income people who are in desperate need of legal aid but cannot afford it. Legal incubators have helped thousands of people in the United States in the last 12 years.” He first came to Bulgaria for a meeting of Roma law students and lawyers, organized by the Open Society Foundation. He met an impressive group of young Bulgarians seeking ways to advance the legal skills needed to better serve their communities and the Bulgarian people — so Fred decided to try to develop his legal incubator model here in cooperation with the Equal Opportunities Initiative Association (EOIA), which became his host institution for his Specialist and Core Fulbright awards in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

Through team work and the support received from a network of lawyers, law students, judges, NGO leaders and the Bulgarian Fulbright Community, Daniela Mihaylova of EOIA and Fred Rooney were able to craft a proposal for the development of a legal incubator that was accepted and later funded by the Trust for Social Achievement. With joint efforts, a core group of mentors to help train incubator participants were recruited, space in which to house the project has been identified, and additional support from a wide cross section of community leaders was generated. We are very proud of their hard work, and we wish them good luck, courage, and inspiration as they embark on this challenging new venture!
It is with great sadness that we inform you of the passing of Professor Emeritus Dr. Randall Baker. Professor Baker was a two-time Fulbright Scholar in Bulgaria. He served as chair of the Fulbright Program’s Aegean/Black Sea Region Peer Review Committee for three years and was a member of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission Board. Professor Baker was a Distinguished Professor at the New Bulgarian University, where he was honored with the Doctor Honoris Causa award. He was also a Professor Emeritus of the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University, where he was a professor for 22 years. He is the author of 17 books, and over 200 papers. He helped to build universities in Seville, Madrid, the UK, Bolivia, Azerbaijan, Lesotho and Bulgaria. He also worked with the World Bank, UNESCO, UNEP, and has lent his expertise and knowledge to academics and policymakers from all over the world. He advised the government of Bulgaria on its entry into the European Union, served as project planning advisor to the government of Fiji, advisor to the prince of Mecca, and advisor to Sultanate of Brunei. He was made an Honorary Member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, an Honorary Professor of Western University in Azerbaijan, and received a Distinguished Service Award from NIDA in Thailand in 2002. He was named an Honorary Citizen of Breze, Bulgaria, and appointed an Honorary British Consul in Rwanda. He will be dearly missed.

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the passing of Professor Dr. Iliya Denev. Prof. Denev was a Fulbright Scholar in AY 2015-16 in the field of Plant Pathology and was carrying out research in two leading STEM institutions: Pennsylvania State University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Prof. Denev was a long-time lecturer and academic supervisor to young Bulgarian biologists at the Department of Plant Pathology and Molecular Biology in Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”. He was a participant of numerous international research groups in the field of Plant Pathology and a frequent leader of projects funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund. He was also a co-director of NATO-Science for Peace program projects, involved in years of collaboration with US universities and research centers. An active member of the Fulbright community, a dedicated mentor for his students, an invaluable expert in the field of molecular biology, Prof. Denev is remembered for his intellectual generosity, academic involvement and friendly kindness. His loss will be palpable. Farewell, Prof. Denev!
Professional storyteller Priscilla Howe (Fulbright Scholar, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, AY 2014-2015) recently received the International Story Bridge Oracle Award at the National Storytelling Summit in Fremont, California. This award recognizes the exemplary work, dedication and spirit of those individuals or groups that promote the art of storytelling in their own country or promote the building of bridges between their country and other countries through the use of storytelling and/or storytelling events. Howe lives in Lawrence, Kansas and travels around the world telling stories to listeners of all ages. She tells stories primarily in English, specializing in stories for English Language Learners, though she has also performed in French and Bulgarian.

Assoc. Prof. Paskal Zhelev (Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, AY 2015-16) from the University of National and World Economy was elected as a member of the Management Committee of the Association of Economic Universities of South and Eastern Europe and the Black Sea Region (ASECU). Assoc. Prof. Zhelev also took part in the Top Management program of the Ministry of education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and during his stay was elected as Vice-Rector for international affairs and internationalization at the Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda State University.

Keana Mirmajlesi (Fulbright ABF ETA AY2018-19 in Varna) had her undergraduate biomedical engineering research published this past year in an article titled “Free radical-mediated targeting and immobilization of coupled payloads” in the Journal of Drug Targeting (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30782037). Keana was a member of the Shreiber Lab as an undergraduate researcher from May 2015 to June 2018. The article proposes novel methods of targeting therapies by using native free radicals as a homing signal, providing promising proof-of-concept for using free radicals to specifically target and sustain nearly endless payloads to disease sites.
During the past 12 months, Dr. Edward A. Friedman (Fulbright Scholar, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, AY 1992-1993; pictured here with Princess Maria Luisa of Bulgaria) has been active as a Board member of the American University in Bulgaria, as well as teaching a course on Nuclear Energy and Society at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ where he is an Emeritus Professor of Technology Management. In June, he spoke at a meeting of the MIT Alumni Association of Northern New Jersey on the topic of Nuclear Energy and Global Warming. Dr. Friedman was among the first Fulbright awardees in Bulgaria after the changes - in 1992, before there was a Fulbright Commission in Bulgaria. His achievements, hard work, and dedication earned him a special issue of the computer science journal *Serdica*, which was published in honor of his 80th birthday in 2015. http://serdica-comp.math.bas.bg/index.php/serdicajcomputing/issue/view/51

Dr. David Jenkins (Fulbright Scholar, University of Plovdiv, AY 1994-1995; Veliko Tarnovo University, AY 1997-1998) had a collection of his English translations of contemporary Bulgarian prose published by Plovdiv University Press in 2019. *Interim Report of the Bulgarian Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance* introduces the wit, wisdom, and weirdness of six contemporary Bulgarian writers: Stanislav Stratiev, Radoy Ralin, Emil Andreev, Ilko Dimitrov, Ivan Cholakov, and Vazken Nalbantian. In the spring semester of 2020, his 2019 collection of Bulgarian-English translations will be the textbook for an elective course at Plovdiv University in contemporary Bulgarian prose in English translation.

*Interim Report of the Bulgarian Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance*

The Wit, Wisdom, and Weirdness
Radou Raina, Emil Andreev, Ilko Dimitrov, Ivan Cholakov, and Vazken Nalbantian

Translations from the Bulgarian by Dr. David Jenkins

Plovdiv University Press, 2019

Associate Prof. Valentina Georgieva, Fulbright Visiting Scholar in AY 2016-17 at Texas State University-San Marcos, participated in three international conferences to present some of her academic research in the field of teaching English to military professionals. The first was hosted by the National Defense University in Bucharest where she demonstrated hybrid approaches to teaching counter-terrorism and radicalization at her home institution Rakovski National Defense College. The second was dedicated to Poland’s 20th anniversary as a NATO member and was held at Jan Kochalowski University in Kielce. There Prof. Georgieva discussed the topic of “Military English Language Capabilities as a Requirement for Security Environment.” The third conference was organized by NATO’s Bureau for International Language Coordination in Tartu, Estonia, where the focus of Prof. Georgieva’s presentation was “Supporting ESP Learning of the Military Personnel.”

Fulbright Visiting Researcher Dr. Angel Igov from Sofia University, who specialized in comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley, AY 2010-11, received the prestigious German literary award “House of the World’s Cultures” for his 2015 novel *The Meek*.

The award is presented to foreign novels translated into German for the first time. Among the previous recipients were such renowned authors as Amos Oz, Mircea Cartarescu and Mikhail Shishkin. Dr. Angel Igov joined this distinguished group with a novel telling the stories of ordinary people from a Sofia neighborhood during the years following September 9, 1944.

Daniel Keifer received a Boren Scholarship in 2019 to study in Kazakhstan. The Boren Fellowship is funding his studies at Nazarbayev University, as an exchange student in Eurasian Studies and Advanced Russian. It is also facilitating the research for his Master’s thesis for Georgetown University, dealing with the history of Kazakhstan’s oil industry and its effects on labor and the development of local economy.
Eireene Nealand, together with her translation partner Daniela Hurezanu, have published an excerpt of a translation of Marguerite Duras’ Le Camion in the London Journal Index on Censorship. Bulgarian author Blagovesta Pugyova’s poem in translation, “Octopus,” was published in Catamaran’s Spring 2019 issue. Eireene’s own short stories “Unit 29” and “About Ahab or Something like That” have been accepted for publication in upcoming issues of Imitation Fruit and Beach Reads: Adrift.

Elizabeth Bews completed her MA in archaeology from Cornell University in December 2018. The title of her thesis is: “After Accession: EU Funding and Archaeological Practice in Bulgaria.” She was also accepted to present a paper at the Archaeological Institute of America’s annual conference in January 2020, titled “The Archaeology of Piracy: The Cilician Case” and will be presenting a paper at the SAAs in April 2020 titled “An Osteobiography of a Juvenile Individual from Papdomb, Transylvania.”

George Miaoulis (US Scholar, VUZF University, AY 2013-2014) co-authored a publication on Netnography as a marketing research tool in the fashion industry in Southeast Europe for the International Journal of Market Research. The article explores the evolving opportunities that online communities present to marketers in collecting consumer insights. It advances Southeast Europe’s marketing researchers’ understanding of netnography by introducing them to its concept, procedures, and implications.