



Newsletter

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FINAL NOMINATIONS FOR BULGARIAN FULBRIGHT GRANTEES IN AY 2006-2007

This year the Commission received 50 applications for Fulbright senior scholar and graduate study grants and Hubert Humphrey fellowships. The binational reviewing committees recommended 29 students and 17 scholars for interview. The interviews were conducted on 18, 19 and 20 October, 2005. The applicants came from a wide variety of fields but almost all of them were of a very high quality. It was not easy for the nomination committee to select the best and most deserving from among such an impressive pool of candidates.



Fulbright Interview, October 18, 2005

Members of the nomination committee: (from left to right) Prof. Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission; Deborah Smith, Commission Member and CAO, US Embassy, and Dr. Shirley Gabel, U.S. Fulbright lecturer.

The following candidates for Fulbright scholarships and Hubert H. Humphrey fellowships in AY 2006-07 were nominated by the Commission Board:

FINAL NOMINATIONS FOR FULBRIGHT GRANTS IN AY 06-07

Senior Scholars

Principal candidates in ranked order:

1. Christo Kyuchukov – education
2. Stelyan Dimitrov – geography
3. Boyan Dobrev – multimedia
4. Lyubima Dimitrova – E-medicine
5. Diana Petkova – cultural studies
6. Tamara Todorova – economics

Alternate candidate:

1. Dimiter Christozov – computer science

Graduate students

Principal candidates in ranked order:

1. Lilyana Vulcheva – MBA
2. Nikolay Bebov – law (corporate law)
3. Elena Atanassova – law (human rights)
4. Ivan Shumkov – architecture
5. Olga Shishkova – law (communication and info technologies)
6. Valentina Nikolova – public policy
7. Ivan Dimitrov – MBA (Fulbright-Oklahoma grant)

Alternate candidates in ranked order:

1. Alexandra Bizerova – MBA
2. Tania Tsoneva – MBA
3. Svetla Yosifova – law (business law)
4. Nadezhda Varbanova – law (commercial law)

Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship

Proposed finalist:

1. Bozhidar Antonov Ivanov – agricultural economics

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Fulbright Interview



Tolga Esmer is a PhD candidate studying Ottoman, Middle Eastern and Balkan history in the history department of the University of Chicago. As a Fulbright student in AY2004-2005 he was assigned to the Institute of Balkan Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Science. Recently Snejana Teneva, educational adviser of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, took the following interview from him.

Snejana Teneva: Tolga, since 2000 it is your fourth trip to Bulgaria. What was the purpose of your visits to the country?

Tolga Esmer: During my previous trips to Bulgaria I came to the country to learn the Bulgarian language. In 2000, I came to Bulgaria for the first time. I enrolled in an intense language-learning course on a FLAS summer grant. I met with an individual tutor 4 hours everyday. I really worked hard, and my tutor was excellent. During the 1999/2000 academic-year, I began studying Bulgarian as an independent study;

however, I only met with my instructor at the University of Washington a couple of times each quarter. So when I came to Bulgaria, I could not speak or understand the language. By the end of my 1 1/2 month stay in the summer of 2000, thanks to my instructor and hard work, I could already begin to converse. During this summer, I also had the opportunity to travel throughout Bulgaria and Macedonia, and I had the distinct pleasure of meeting the diverse people of this region and speaking with them.

Unfortunately my momentum in Bulgaria slowed down as I began my PhD program at the University of Chicago because I then had to focus on my class-work and Ottoman Turkish, the official, hybrid language of the Ottoman state. The language, although now „dead,“ is a hybrid of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian language, grammar, and lexicons written in the Arabic script.

By the summer of 2002, I again had the chance to come to Bulgaria to study the language intensively for 1 1/2 months. During that summer, I came to Bulgaria on summer FLAS grant, and I again studied Bulgarian every single day for a couple of hours with a private tutor. By the end of the summer, not only was I conversing more proficiently, but I also worked real hard in reading comprehension. Everyday, in addition to studying grammar, I brought in different kinds of articles and books in Bulgarian concerning Ottoman and Balkan history.

In the summer of 2003, I came to Bulgaria for a pre-dissertation research trip. I spent some time at the Kiril and Methodius National Library in Sofia in order to see what kind of sources I could use to research my initial hypotheses. I also had the

opportunity to meet with different Bulgarian scholars working on Ottoman and Balkan history in Sofia. It was during this summer that I conceived of my research project and realized that my initial hypotheses were feasible as a research project and that I would be able to use sources in Ottoman Turkish both in Bulgaria and Istanbul.

S.T. When did your interest in Ottoman and Turkish history arise?

T.E. My interest in Ottoman and Balkan history arose from my own identity crises and curiosity in my family's „heritage.“ As a second-generation Turkish-American, I grew up in rural West Virginia, and my parents did not really teach my brothers and me Modern Turkish. I think that my parents were planning on returning to Turkey ultimately, so they wanted us to learn English extremely well. One thing led to another, and my parents ended up staying in America.

Since my family came from a very cosmopolitan background and all of my relatives live in Turkey, I found it strange that I could not converse with my own relatives in Turkish. I was much different than my childhood friends in West Virginia because I traveled quite a bit as kid, and my parents instilled in us a much broader world-view (my father was a university professor). Nevertheless, my parents de-emphasized our cosmopolitan background, thinking that it would be much easier for us to „integrate“ into American society. But by default, even though we blended in very well into our community, we were very different than all of the kids around us. I knew that my future would be much different than the futures of my friends at a very early age, and I guess that I attributed these differences to this „Turkishness“ – something that I really did not understand when I was younger.

When I was in college, I had the opportunity to take classes in Ottoman, Middle Eastern, and Byzantine history, so this is when I began to think of Ottoman history and the history of its successor states in the Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Central Asia, and the Middle East more seriously and critically. I was extremely interested in the national histories and

memories of Ottoman rule over different regions in the world, and it was while I was in college that I began to seriously contemplate learning Turkish and other languages to become a scholar in Ottoman history. Moreover, I was fortunate to have an instructor in Ottoman history who was actually of Armenian descent. Despite what happened to the Armenians during the demise of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, he always delivered his lectures on Ottoman history very soberly and very impartially, and I found this inspiring. He saw the empire for what it was – a cosmopolitan empire where the contemporary, „hodge-podge,“ competing national identities of the current successor-states of the Empire really had no meaning.

By 1998 I was enrolled in a Masters Program in Middle Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Washington in Seattle where I began learning Modern Turkish, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish. I then had the opportunity to spend a year living in Istanbul, where I was a visiting student at the Boğaziçi University. It was in Turkey that I learned the language, began to make sense of my own past, and made the decision to pursue a career in academia. Living in Turkey in 1998 was probably one of the most formative experiences in my life because not only did I learn the language, but a vibrant group of Turkish intellectuals who were very critical of the Turkish nation-state and perceptions of Ottoman history prevalent in discourse also surrounded and influenced me. The problem with many diasporic groups in America is that they blindly defend anything that's Turkish, any thing that is Bulgarian, or any thing that is French for that matter without really knowing what „Turkish“ or „French“ really means. It was in Istanbul that began to make sense of my own American experience and became ready to write and think about Ottoman and Balkan history soberly and critically.

Of course, while my interests in Ottoman history were beginning to shape into a career path, the world was shocked by all of the instability and ethnic violence taking place in the Balkan nation-states after the fall of communism. The civil wars in Yugoslavia were, of course, the most violent episodes in this period of transition, but even in Bulgaria many

Muslim minorities fled the country to Turkey, Europe, and the United States to free-themselves from religious/ethnic persecution as the Bulgarian government forced many Muslims living in Bulgaria change their names to „Bulgarian,“ Christian names. Underlying all of these processes throughout the Balkans were anachronistic appropriations of the Ottoman past being rekindled for current political purposes. In other words, in the time of political and economic stability, Muslims of the Balkan countries were the scapegoats blamed for the unstable times that befell these countries in this time of transition.

I found this process extremely disturbing, but I was nonetheless fascinated by the events. The fact that Bosnians were being persecuted and killed off as the last vestiges of the „Turks“ (even though they have nothing whatsoever to do with ethnic „Turks“ or even speak Turkish for that matter), the resurgence of Christian conservatism throughout the Orthodox population, the emergence of an Islamic identity and even Salafite Islam promoted by Saudi Arabian organizations in the Balkans, Kosovar Albanians joining the rest of the Balkan nation-states in inventing grandiose, imperial pasts of their peoples to justify conflicting territorial claims of their neighbors – all of these phenomenon were intertwined with the problematic national historiographies and national memories of the Balkan states, and I knew that there was plenty of work to be done in the field. None of these Balkan states ever had enormous empires whose boundaries stretched from the Adriatic to the Black Sea or the Danube River to the Aegean/Mediterranean Seas; however, all of them claimed such histories to justify territorial ambitions and blamed the period of „Ottoman Slavery“ for ruining their imaginary, imperial pasts.

Another thing I found extremely disturbing as these events unfolded in the Balkans was how the rest of the world merely watched as thousands and thousands of people were being persecuted and cleansed. In Europe and America, we wrote-off this violence in the Balkans as age-old, „tribal“ vendettas that we should not become embroiled in; however, the fact is that this ethnic, religious, and national violence in the region is very new – something that began with the emergence of the Balkan nation-states only at the

end of the 19th century/beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, in Turkey, the current, „secularist“ government of the time could not get involved because they saw the violence from the vantage point of „Muslims“ – not „Turks – being ethnically cleansed, and since the government was staunchly secular, it could not intervene on behalf of the Muslims since this would run counter to the current political discourse and set an unwelcome precedent.

I knew that it was incumbent upon me to educate American students – future leaders and citizens – about the former lands of the Ottoman Empire and the current cultures and peoples of the Balkans, Middle East, and Central Asia so that when instability and violence resurfaces in the Balkans, the region will not seem so remote and foreign to them to the point Americans they can justify indifference. I think that this is all the more important in a time when Islam and the Christendom are artificially pitted against each other. It is my job to deconstruct national myths and national memory, and also debunk the idea that Islam and Christianity are inherently incompatible. So, to summarize my answer, my interests in the history of this region were initially linked with my need to make sense of my own past, but as I became comfortable with my own identity and past, my interests broadened and matured.

S.T. What does Fulbright mean to you?

T.E. Fulbright is one of the very cores of the American academe. The Fulbright and Fulbright-Hayes grants not only gives foreigners the chance to come study in the US, but it also allows the US scholars to travel abroad, broaden their horizons, and make significant contributions to world scholarship in their specific fields.

The Fulbright program is probably one of the largest organizations that funds recent university graduates and graduate students to study abroad. I have heard of many complaints about Fulbright students – that the US government is funding Fulbright scholars who are not „patriotic“ enough or who complain about US policy abroad.

Some of the Fulbright scholars are indeed critical of

US policies abroad because many Fulbrighters have spent a lot of time researching and thinking about their specific world area politics and cultures and learning regional languages, so Fulbrighters are very familiar with how US foreign policy plays out abroad. At times, American foreign policy is not held to the same system of checks and balances that our internal, democratic system is held to, so naturally when we have the large majority of American citizens who do not know very much about a foreign region, we do not have citizens who object to American foreign policy makers. Dissent and criticism of politics is very crux of American society, and if our country were to lose the Fulbright program, then this would be a tragic loss to both the American academe and the world. It is only natural that graduate students who have spent years studying a particular region, language(s), and culture(s) are more informed of the region than the narrow, transient interests of policy makers.

In the past 4 years, I have heard that programs like Fulbright and Fulbright-Hayes have been attacked in Congress, whereas, after September 11, other types of government grant institutions have been created to facilitate America's defense needs. It is only natural that the US government should expect something in return for the generous grants that they give Fulbright scholars.

What I would suggest is that some of the work of Fulbright scholars who study the history/anthropology, languages, and cultures of regions be considered by foreign policy makers who make decisions that affect world regions. Although the interests of the US government are necessarily more narrow than history, anthropology, and culture, the government can very well benefit from taking these things into consideration before acting.

This is a two-way process in which scholars must also learn how their work is of relevance to US foreign policy interests. I suggest that in the future, the Fulbright organization and its grantees should figure out ways in which the study of history/anthropology and culture is relevant to US foreign policy. In this sense, in an age when the future of Fulbright is potentially threatened, Fulbright could possibly make

a niche in bridging the gap between the „aloof“ and pedantic work of many of the scholars it funds and the needs of the US government by providing the US government and its narrower political, military, and economic interests with supplementary work on the histories, anthropology, and cultures of the societies involved in US foreign policy.

To me, the Fulbright grant made my dream of writing a dissertation and later – I hope – a book on the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans a reality, but I think that the Fulbright organization could be much more. I think that it could be an organization that can potentially help the US government bridge the gap between the intricate system of checks and balances we hold our domestic policy to and the lack of a system of checks and balances that inform our foreign policy.

S.T. What did you learn about Bulgaria and Turkey, the Bulgarians and the Turks and about Islam and Christianity in the advance of your Fulbright project?

T.E. Well, to begin with, the beginning of my research period is the end of the 18th century, so it is not exactly clear who are „Bulgarians“ and who are „Turks.“ This period was before the beginning of the national movements, which came later in the 19th century. At that time, identities were much more fluid and rich; people did not think of themselves as „Bulgarians“ or „Turks.“

I am working on the period known as the „Kurdzhaliisko Vreme“ in Ottoman-Bulgarian history, a tumultuous period of widespread revolt throughout the Ottoman Balkans. In both Turkish and Ottoman historiography, this period is remembered as the time in which the „central“ Ottoman government was breaking down, and thus various measures were needed to reinstate stability in the region. In Turkish historiography, historians have pointed to the rebels of the period as „religious fanatics“ or „unpatriotic nuisances“ who brought forth the ultimate demise of the Empire, whereas, in Bulgarian and other Balkan historiographies, these rebels are seen as „feudal lords“ who not only caused a breakdown in domestic order but also men who made a profession out of terrorizing the lives of the

local Christians. In all historiographical traditions, this is known as a time of change in which the state had to make modernizing reforms to reinstate stability in the region, which ultimately resulted in different outcomes for various peoples looking back to the period. The Turkish scholars (and the European and American scholars informed by Turkish historiography) see this as the beginning of the modernized, centralized state that comprised the roots of the Turkish Republic. The Bulgarians and other Balkan scholars see this as the beginning of the Balkan nation-states and the various national „renaissances.“ For instance, Bulgarian historiography looks to the fact that the Ottoman government relied heavily on local Christian nobles to help the Empire to restore order in Rumeli. This meant that the Christian nobles and the local populations were armed against some of the Muslim rebels, so Bulgarians definitely see this as an abrupt change; however, if one looks back to previous periods, Christians always played large roles in the Empire – both militarily or economically.

To make a long story short, I do not necessarily look at the turmoil at this period as such an abrupt change in the Ottoman order in the Balkans. When one sits down and delves through Ottoman, Old Church Slavonic/Bulgarian/Serbian, or even Greek sources for that matter, one can easily see that the constitution of rebels protesting against the Ottomans was not drawn along religious or ethnic lines. To be sure, we cannot even speak of „ethnic“ divisions at this point, because this is a different phenomenon that comes later. Both Muslims and Christians participated with the rebels and with the Empire in fighting these rebels, so it is really a much more complex phenomenon. Back then allegiances and identity were much more fluid, and they were not as „fixed“ as they are today in the modern world. It is much more useful to talk about the Ottoman peoples in their local contexts rather than in general terms such as Muslims versus Christians.

I have found hundreds of documents concerning one of the most notorious rebels during this period, and I also have just as many documents concerning people in his retinue or people whom he was associated with. However, these sources are primarily official state

sources, so one has to be very careful in using them. To the state, this rebel and his retinue are by default the lowest men on earth, „enemies of religion“ (i.e. fanatics or heretics), etc. But the state sources in themselves are interesting because they betray the fact that the Ottomans themselves were so puzzled because the local Rumeli populations were often joining the rebels.

I have also found some of the correspondence written by this rebel, his family, and others in his retinue that also add a different dimension to this story. Moreover, I have found old Bulgarian sources such as *pripiski* (marginalia) and *letopisi* (chronicles) that also address this rebel and his retinue, and the way this rebel is portrayed in these types of Christian sources is also very ambiguous. To some he is a villain, yet to others, he is seen as just. It is my hope that further research of different kinds of sources such as local Muslim and Christian religious hagiographies or other types of narrative sources will add dimensions to this story that I cannot find in the official Ottoman sources.

S.T. Which are the most interesting documents that you found in the Ottoman archival collection of the National Library in Sofia?

T.E. I have found many crucial sources in the Kiril and Methodius National Library’s *Orientaliski Otdel*, the very rich Ottoman archive here in Sofia. I have found sources written by Ottoman administrators in the Ottoman Balkans concerning the rebel and his retinue that I am working on. I have probably found more Ottoman sources concerning this man and his retinue in Istanbul than I have found in Bulgaria; however, what I have not found in Turkey are the letters actually written by this man, his family, and his retinue. I have only found these in Sofia. In the National Library here in Sofia, I have also found dozens of published Old Church Slavonic/Bulgarian/ Serbian chronicles and other types of sources that have also added a crucial element to my project. Moreover, Bulgarian historiography and national memory is obsessed with the period I am working on, and throughout last century, Bulgarians have portrayed this short, 30 year period as representative of 500 years of Ottoman rule

in the region, so there are so many different layers of historiography, national literature, and other genres of popular culture that deal with this period and even the very rebel I am working on, so there are many rich layers to this story that I have been researching while in Bulgaria.

S.T. Which are the challenges that you faced during your research in Bulgaria?

T.E. The biggest challenge I faced was that the Ottoman archives in the national library in Sofia really are not completely open to the world community. To begin with, their funding is very limited, so the sources that are catalogued are written in very sloppy handwriting and not typed in legible formats in neat volumes. Suffice it to say that there are absolutely no databases that scholars can use concerning different types of Ottoman sources. For instance, both Ottoman documents and summaries of Ottoman archival collections in Istanbul are slowly being entered into databases so that scholars around the world can use them. One's reaction to this may naturally be that this is not Turkey, but Ottoman history is a very large field in Bulgaria as well, and the Ottoman archives in Sofia is one of the largest Ottoman archives in the world outside of Istanbul. Ottomanists throughout the world are waiting for the archives here in Sofia to be more accessible, and slowly this is happening.

My most serious concern is that staff in the Ottoman archive here is intentionally not cataloguing all of the sources because some of them want either themselves or Bulgarian scholars to be the first people to write publications on this Ottoman sources. There are thousands of Ottoman manuscripts in Sofia that Bulgarian scholars cannot even access. These are some of the richest Ottoman sources, yet they are merely sitting on shelves in the archive completely unused because one or two people feel that they should be the ones who divulge them to the rest of the world.

The problem is that those people who want to „save“ these sources so that they can be the ones who divulge them really do not know who to approach them both theoretically and methodologically. What

this means is that is very hard for Ottomanist historiography in this country to advance. The same old sources (those available to the regular scholar or young, aspiring graduate student who cannot exert pressure on the library staff) are being used, and some of the same old approaches are being regurgitated. There has been outcry in the international community of Ottomanists for the Bulgarian to completely open their archives, but demands have been met very slowly.

I do not completely understand the logic at play here, but I think that it is because one or two people want to be the first people to write about these unpublished sources. The problem is that this is way too much work for one or two people – or even the entire community of Bulgarian Ottomanists. At any rate, these people who are „saving“ the sources for themselves and Bulgarian scholars can only write in Bulgarian, so no one outside of Bulgaria will even read these books. Not only will opening up the library benefit the rest of the world-community of Ottomanist scholars, but it will reinvigorate the approaches and methodologies of Bulgarian scholars who work on Ottoman-Balkan history. If the conditions remain as they are today, then the same old meta-narratives of the 5 centuries of oppression, stagnation, forced-conversions, the burning of libraries, etc. – the dark period of „Turkish slavery“ will only be regurgitated time and time again. As we have seen in the last decade both in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, in extreme times, this stagnate perception of the past can often be used for current political moves to exclude, persecute, and dare I say destroy, various minority groups who are seen as „remnants“ of the Ottoman past.

S.T. Could you establish professional relations with Bulgarian scholars?

T.E. YES! Both students and professors in Bulgaria have been extremely encouraging and have gone out of their way to help me with my Bulgarian, reading Bulgarian sources, bringing both Bulgarian and Ottoman sources to my attention, etc. Without the help of Bulgarian scholars, I could not have conceived of my research project and executed my research strategies.

S.T. Did you make friends in Bulgaria?

T.E. My primary friends in Bulgaria are generally my colleagues, whom I spend time with both inside and outside of the research libraries and archives. I have also made many friends outside of my profession; however, I must add that making friends outside of my profession has been a more challenging experience. Upon meeting many educated Bulgarians in Sofia, I have presented myself mostly as an „American.“ However, upon introducing my name to many Bulgarians, as soon as some learn that I have „Turkish“ origins, their interest in my work and me seem to dwindle. The fact that I am Turkish seems to be constitutive of some kind of threat to some people. What is most interesting is that I have only experienced this in Sofia, the „cultural capital“ and most „cosmopolitan“ city in Bulgaria, whereas, in the provinces, being „Turkish“ has not really been any kind of obstacle to meeting people and having genuine and meaningful conversations. This inherent distrust or animosity toward anything Turkish is reinforced everyday as I walk through Sofia, as on every corner one can read graffiti throughout the city „Turtsi pod nozha“ – „Kill Turks (with knives).“ I have not really encountered this in other Bulgarian cities, and I find it extremely disturbing that in the cultural capital of this nation, one confronts this everywhere. If this is the example that all other places in Bulgaria have to follow, then Bulgaria really has not learned very much from the Zhivkov period and its isolation from the rest of the world during that period. To be sure, I do not think that

I can make any kind of generalization based on the dozen or so incidents that I have experienced or all of the graffiti one encounters in Sofia; however, intolerance is much more widespread than I anticipated.

S.T. How did Fulbright change your life?

T.E. This is a difficult question because some of the most formative years of my life actually began before my tenure here in Bulgaria as a Fulbright scholar while I was a graduate student in the US. However, the opportunity that Fulbright has given me to actually carry out my dissertation research has been a very formative experience and has been crucial in allowing me to turn my dreams of completing my dissertation into a reality. Without Fulbright, my dissertation would have been mere ideas.

S.T. What are your future plans?

T.E. This next year I will continue to carry out dissertation research both in Bulgaria and Turkey, and I will also begin to start writing the initial chapters of my dissertation. After completing my dissertation, I intend to pursue a career in academia as professor in Ottoman, Balkan, and Middle Eastern studies. I hope to have the opportunity to teach not only at the university level in the US but also in Turkey and the Balkans. It is also my intention to ultimately turn my dissertation into a book and continue to research and writing on the Ottoman Empire/Middle East and the Balkans.

BULGARIAN FULBRIGHT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP FORM

Full name

Home address

Field, Academic Rank and Degree.....

Present Place and Address of.....

Employment.....

Phone, Fax.....

Type, Year and Duration of Grant.....

Place and Name of Host Institution.....

Please complete and return to the Fulbright commission office address.

Fulbright Office News

AFTER TWO MONTHS IN BULGARIA



Meeting of the U.S. Fulbright grantees with the Commission staff

CULTURAL ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES FOR U.S. FULBRIGHT GRANTEES



Visit to the Boyana Church

2005 U.S. BASED TRAINING PROGRAM FOR OVERSEAS EDUCATIONAL ADVISERS October 21 - November 12, 2005

This year the US-based program for overseas educational advisers provided training and international experience to 20 advisers from Armenia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chad, China, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia and Uruguay. The three weeks of intensive work involved a Washington week, campus visits and attendance at the regional NAFSA conference in Colorado Springs. Each component of the program provided detailed, hands-on learning in areas such as trends in U.S. higher education,

office and information resource management, accreditation and degree equivalences and communicating cross-culturally, among other important issues.

Snejana Teneva, educational adviser of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, made a good use of the many opportunities to obtain new information, develop practical skills and promote the Fulbright Program in Bulgaria. Bulgaria was represented at the Country Fair organized at the NAFSA Regional Conference with a special stand which was visited by over 200 participants.



The 2005 USBT participants



A Bulgarian student (middle) shows Colorado College to USBT participants

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK November 14-18, 2005

The International Education Week in Bulgaria attracted an impressive group of students, professors and teachers from a great number of Bulgarian schools, colleges and universities all over the country. A highlight of this year's IEW was the official launch of a Master's Program in Transatlantic Studies at the Department of British and American Studies and the Department of History of Sofia University. The Program is supported by the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission and the Bulgarian-American Studies Association (BASA).



Official launch of the Master's Program in Transatlantic Studies at Sofia University

A series of OPEN DOORS activities were also conducted at the Commission's advising center: workshops, meetings, video-sessions etc. The major topics of the discussions were: undergraduate and graduate study in the U.S., successful M.B.A. admissions, Fulbright grants and other scholarships, student visas, tests and testing updates. All visitors had free



Kelly Pertzsch, Admissions Representative of Richmond University giving a talk on the specifics of an American university in the U.K.

Internet access at the advising center.

In addition, the Fulbright advising center was visited by representatives of four U.S. institutions of higher education: St. John's University, New York, NY; Richmond University (The American International University in London); the University of Chicago, IL and Bard College, NY. Mariane Hodge, Assistant Director of International Admissions of St. John's University; Kelly Pertzsch, Admissions Representative and Mark Kopenski, Vice President of Enrollment of Richmond University; Theodore O'Neill, Dean of Admissions of the University of Chicago and Bonnie Marcus, Senior Associate Director of Admission of Bard College presented their institutions and the American educational system to interested students, parents, school principals and teachers.

БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН

УЧЕБНИЯТ ЦЕНТЪР КЪМ КОМИСИЯ "ФУЛБРАЙТ" ПРЕДЛАГА:

- Английски език всички нива по системата "New Headway"
- Курсове за подготовка за TOEFL iBT, NEW SAT, GRE, GMAT
- Подготовка по английски език за кандидат-студенти в УНСС
- Курсове по бизнес английски и бизнес кореспонденция
- Разговорен курс за програмата WORK & TRAVEL
- Компютърна самоподготовка за TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT

БЕЗПЛАТНИ УСЛУГИ ЗА КУРСИСТИ:

- Регистрация за тестовете TOEFL, GRE, GMAT
- English speaking club with native speakers
- Безплатни 10 часа компютърна самоподготовка
- Отстъпки от цените при записване за повече от един курс
- Консултации за обучение в САЩ
- Библиотека с учебна и справочна литература

За информация: София 1504, ул. "Панайот Волов" №1, етаж II
тел. 944 0441, E-mail: studycenter@fulbright.bg, www.fulbright.bg

To Chicago and Back

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

By Mario Marinov

Mario Marinov is an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" Blagoevgrad. He is working on a Ph.D. thesis on "New Religious Movements in Bulgaria" and has published numerous articles. Mario is the author of the article on Bulgaria in the forthcoming Worldmark Encyclopedia of Religious Practices, Gale Group. He is also a member of the American Academy of Religion. In the summer of 2004 he participated in the Fulbright American Studies Institute on "Religion in the U.S.: Pluralism & Public Presence" at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Traditionally a history of religion in the United States starts with the story of the first settlers and the Christian heritage they started this nation with. But a different approach would study religions in this country from the ancient Native American traditions; continue with the Christian heritage; explore the unique American contributions to the religious makeup of the world such as Mormonism, Christian Science, and Pentecostalism; then revise the picture after 1965 when the new immigration legislation allowed many Eastern religions to settle in the U.S. Today it is impossible to study religion in America without paying attention to the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, and Japanese religious communities, and the continuously appearing new religious movements. The most religiously diverse nation in the world has not only added a typical American



Visiting the Sikh Gurdwara in Atlanta, GA

flavor to many world religions such as Roman Catholicism, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity, but has also created a special place for religion in its public space: it is impossible to imagine family and community life, culture and even the streets in the United States without the diverse buildings of numerous religious groups, following one after another at every corner. This is not without a reason: religion is the essence of social life in this country from its beginning. The first settlers came predominantly from religious activists who were considered dissidents or radicals within their countries of origin; they had to travel for months in ships through the ocean and all the stress they accumulated during storms, as well as from the attacks of the Native Americans, developed a sense of dependence on the will of a mighty supernatural power. Immigrant communities are

largely dependent on religious rituals and collective gatherings in their groups in order to preserve identities and traditions such as language, food, marriage and education.

My first visit to the United States taught me important insights about the role of religious pluralism in society. Together with 17 Fulbright scholars from all over the world I was able not only to study but to live and feel the role of religion by visiting a diverse number of communities throughout the country. It was an opportunity to see the involvement of religion in spheres such as family life and many others.

For example, at the Sinai Temple, a liberal synagogue in Los Angeles, there is a unique event every second Friday of the month, called Friday Night Live, targeted at members of the Californian Jewish community who are predominantly in the age group 25-40, thus enabling them to make new contacts, and later form couples, start families, have children. In this way the religious community preserves itself and, though it does not directly participate, it encourages this process.



A dinner before the Friday Night Live at the Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, CA - a liberal synagogue

The Friday Night Live is a well balanced combination of religious service, communal singing and dancing, as well as numerous possibilities of informal contacts.

In Utah we were able to witness a different dimension of pluralism in the U.S. This state is characterized by the strong public presence of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), which unlike most other states, stands as a traditional religion there. I understood that many Americans from other states themselves have not ever been to Utah and this creates a special atmosphere in this place: the local people are very hospitable to visitors and try to make them feel comfortable, which reminded me of the patriarchal hospitality in small Bulgarian towns. This is definitely enhanced by the presence of many religious people in one place.

All over the clean and tidy Salt Lake City, as well as in

Provo, one can observe the different institutions, museums and monument connected with the Latter Day Saints Church. Another feature is the presence of young men in suits and ties amidst high temperatures, which was unlike California, where T-shirts, shorts and sandals were the main clothes amidst much more favorable climate.



The Latter Day Saints Temple in Salt Lake City, UT

Megachurches are another American invention. They are usually housed in post-modern multiplex movie theaters combined with large parking facilities, shopping malls, restaurants and cafes. Their target group is the individualist middle class entrepreneurs and the services are designed in a business style fashion.



The Saddleback megachurch in Lake Forest, CA

Dress in the megachurch is mostly informal. The weekend services are several in order to match the time preferences of busy people. They usually drive to the church in their cars and combine the church attendance with the weekly shopping, which can also take place at the megachurch complex.

Unlike the megachurches, in the African American churches people wear their Sunday best clothes for the church service. The service at the Ebenezer Baptist church in Atlanta, where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preached, has a unique flavor of music and style.

We cannot explore pluralism in America without an original annual even in June in Santa Barbara - the Solstice Parade. It features different groups who worship the Sun and can be a good challenge to anybody who is used to think about religion only in conventional terms.

Native Americans, different mythical creatures, unusual vehicles, combined with post-modern features like a man

dressed exclusively in CDs could be observed during the Solstice Parade. A part of the procession was carrying the



*The Solstice Parade
in Santa Barbara, CA*

portrait of the governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger, adding to my mind an interesting dimension of the understanding of church-state relations. Evangelicalism is a very important and active part of the U.S. religious scene. It has a variety of ranges between fundamentalist, conservative, and liberal; black and white; Hispanic and English speaking; re-

valist and charismatic. Together with Roman Catholicism it is the most active religious trend in the country.

The Pentecostal movement, which developed at the beginning of the 20th century as a revitalization movement within Christianity, is another American invention. It is an example of religion which spread around the world from the United States and today it is the fastest growing religion in the world, which also constitutes the majority of Bulgarian Protestants.

The building in Azusa St in Los Angeles, where a revival took place at an independent mission in 1906, today houses the Japanese Daily Sun in the district known as the Little Tokyo and is close to the Japanese American Cultural Center.



Azusa St in Los Angeles, CA - the place, from which Pentecostalism spread around the world in 1906.

The United States cannot be imagined without the traditional world religions. Roman Catholics constitute the majority of Americans, though the diverse Protestant churches are also significant in number.

The National Cathedral in Washington, DC originally stands for the Episcopal Church - that is the American version of the Church of England, e.g. the traditional religion of the country where the first settlers came from. Today it has opened its doors to people of all faiths and is a place of national focus.



*The National Cathedral in
Washington, DC*

Islam and Judaism have a significant presence in the United States. Islamic centers are usually modern buildings where prayers take place in comfortable facilities and they open Sunday schools for the

Muslim children, which is an example of the Protestant influence experienced by other religions in America.

An interesting point in my Fulbright experience was my visit to the Orthodox Church in Isla Vista, California, situated in a small building and attended mostly by local Americans. The Protestant influence was obvious in the interior of the church, which had pews and a small kitchen unlike Orthodox churches, which we are accustomed to see in our region. It also had elements in the service itself, which were not very customary for people from traditionally Orthodox Christian countries. It was nice to hear Orthodox church singing in a Californian accent.

Religious pluralism is definitely gaining momentum in the world today despite of the fundamentalist constrains in many places of the world. Though European countries have a different cultural composition, the model of religious pluralism, practiced in the United States, has a lot to offer to our efforts to make the world a better place and to understand the point of view of the others. Bulgarian society has good traditions of neighborhood between different religious communities and can successfully develop its own religious pluralism.

Out of America

Kristen Faucetta graduated from Boston College in May 2005 with a degree in political science and minors in East European studies and history. Her Fulbright project is in the field of Sociology and deals with teenagers in Bulgarian orphanages.



When I searched the internet three years ago for a short-term volunteer opportunity in Bulgaria, I had no idea how much the result would shape the course of my life. Thus far, it has influenced the topic of my senior thesis, my Fulbright project, and the type of masters that I will pursue next year at graduate school. The workcamp, run by MAR – the Bulgarian Youth Alliance for Development, was supposed to round out my summer trip to Bulgaria, since I would first be taking language classes that were a continuation of my studies in the United States.

For two weeks, I lived in an institution in Plovdiv called the Rodopski Pansion. It housed young people in the state's care, aged fourteen to eighteen years old. My role, and that of the other foreign volunteers, was essentially to spend time with these teenagers, and entertain them in a way during their summer vacation. The situation in

which these young adults lived, and the stories they told of their lives and their prospects for the future, made me want to do more, however. I had many questions. The thesis that I completed in my senior year at Boston College answered some of them, since I researched state policies toward orphans in Bulgaria, Romania and Russia. I am very glad though that I am now able to search for even more answers as I carry out the research for my Fulbright project.

The interviews that I have begun to conduct with certain young adults from the Bulgarian child care system have given me the privilege of hearing their stories firsthand. I believe this is essential, since good policy can only be formed after genuine knowledge of, and advice from, those who will be affected by it. I cannot stress enough that this is one of the true joys of the Fulbright experience – reading about child welfare services

in Bulgaria could only provide me with a certain amount of information. Actually hearing about the progress of initiatives, from teenagers, NGOs and government representatives alike, is invaluable.

As a foreigner in Bulgaria, I have had the opportunity to meet a wide variety of interesting people, which of course includes the other Fulbright grantees. I am also fortunate to have joined the International Women's Club in Sofia. Because I am a member of this organization, I hear about some very interesting cultural opportunities. Although at times it is disconcerting being a foreigner, I am able to do things, such as tour the National Theater, that would not be offered to me, nor could I afford, as an American in the United States.

Besides the social aspects of this organization, being a member has aided my research. I have visited several orphanages, some with other members of the International Women's Club of Sofia, which has helped me gain a much better understanding of the conditions in which these children live. Since I have visited in this capacity, when the focus was not on my presence, I feel as though I have seen things which I might not have otherwise. For instance, I visited one so-called auxiliary school, which accommodates both boarders and day students, both those with and without parents. As ladies from the IWC toured the institution, the director unlocked a door to show off the six computers that had been recently donated. One might be led to believe that the children were able to take advantage of this valuable gift. However, the director also took the opportunity to ask the one Bulgarian woman that was visiting to show her how to operate the computer – since she did not even know how to open a word document and begin typing. I was the only other person in the room at the time, and so I was privy to the knowledge that, so far at least, the computer donation remained locked away from the children it was supposed to benefit.

When I am appalled at the situation, on a day when the orphanage director was expecting a contingent of foreigners who are bringing donations, there is truly something very wrong. At the same institution of which I just wrote, supposedly the children showered every Saturday, but some of them looked as though it had been much longer since they had seen soap and water. There were a few toys placed on top of the empty cabinets, but they were not even age appropriate. There did not seem to be any notebooks, and textbooks written in Bulgarian were in short supply. And like many institutions which house those who were not considered „ideal“ under the communist system, this one is hidden away on a mountain road, which only adds to these children's isolation from society.

I do not mean to suggest that all children's institutions in Bulgaria are in this condition. I have also visited some where I have been very impressed by a director who goes out of her way to improve the lives of the children in her care. Even when an individual is exemplary, however, the entire system is underfunded and rife with inconsistencies. For example, the teenagers that „graduate“ from the Kniaz Boris Training School do not receive diplomas, which can inhibit their chances of finding employment. Since these young men and women were classified early in life as having a disability, they were raised in special institutions and made to attend a special high school which does not operate under the Ministry of Education. To compound the problems, many of them were wrongly classified from the beginning, but once a diagnosis is made, it can take years to reverse the decision and thus the label remains. I spoke to one young woman that grew up in the „special“ institutions, and after completing the training school, has had to begin her high school education over again so that she can receive a real diploma and have a chance to work as a teacher. To accomplish this feat, she goes to school only after working a full day. Yet it still does not seem that her determination alone would be enough,

since the assistance of a private donor enables her to pay her tuition. There is no justice, nor good sense, in the abandonment twice over of teenagers that were given up by their parents and subsequently sent out unprepared into the world.

My Fulbright experience has also made me fully aware of the direction that I would like to pursue next. I have decided to obtain a master's degree in social work so that I may continue work with the type of population that I am currently researching. It seems that no country has a perfect system that both provides for the children in the state's care and releases them when they come of age, well-prepared and with adequate support to face the world's obstacles. Therefore, I feel that I could make a contribution, no matter what specific role I play.

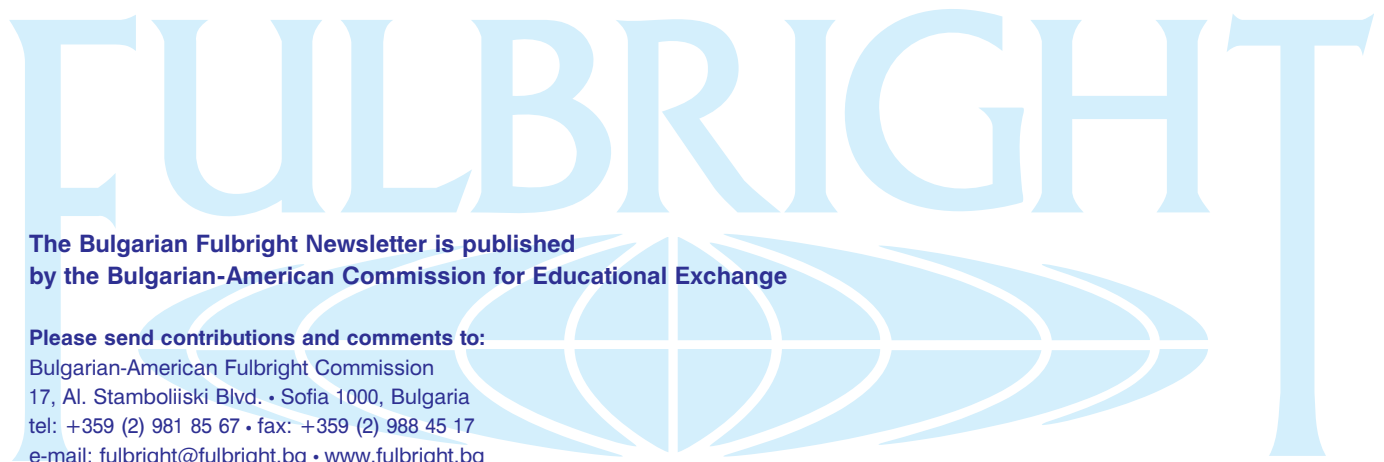
I am excited about the next steps in my research. Due to my membership in the International Women's Club and my involvement in the charity committee, I will be part of the group that plans a Directors' Forum that will be held in May. Participants will include directors of social homes (orphanages), representatives from relevant ministries and nongovernmental organizations. I am extremely fortunate that the theme that has

been chosen for this year's forum is „Preparation for Independent Life“ – just what I am researching. I will be able to view presentations made by UNICEF and the International Social Service Foundation, detailing the progress they have made in their projects involving care leavers. I will also continue the interviews that are a major part of my research, with the young adults who attend the Agapedia after school programs, since they represent both those who will soon age out of the system and those who have recently.

I believe that the value of my Fulbright experience can be expressed using the words of Muhamad Yunus, which can be found in the book *Voices of the Poor: From Many Lands*. I am here to see, and to listen, and to know.

I have a strong feeling that we don't care to know about the poor. We not only don't know about the poor, worse still, we love to make up our own stories to build our favorite theories around them. We have trained our eyes not to see them, trained our ears not to hear them. When we want to hear them, we make sure we hear them the way we wish to hear them. The poor have become invisible people even in a country where they are the majority of the people; they practically do not exist.





The Bulgarian Fulbright Newsletter is published by the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange

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