



Newsletter

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BULGARIAN FULBRIGHT GRANTEES PREPARING TO GO TO THE UNITED STATES



Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, talking to the new group of Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees at the one-day orientation.

On June 22, 2007 the Bulgarian - American Fulbright Commission held a one-day pre-departure orientation for the 20 new Bulgarian grantees.

For AY 2007-2008 Fulbright grants are offered to 9 graduate students, 6 senior scholars, 2 teachers, a school administrator and a professional in the field of public policy. Additionally, an expert in the field of education represents Bulgaria in the prestigious international program "New Century Scholars".

We express our gratitude to all the participants in the orientation program, and especially to the US Fulbrighters in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Fulbright alumni who contributed with their practical advice, pertinent information and fresh sense of humour on a really hot June day.

The Fulbright Commission wishes all grantees a very successful and rewarding stay in the US.

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Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in Academic Year 2007-2008

SENIOR SCHOLARS

- 1. Tatyana Stoicheva**
Field: Cultural Studies
Host institution in the US: University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA
- 2. Gergana Marinova**
Field: Law
Host institution in the US: Northwestern University, School of Law, Chicago, IL.
- 3. Kiril Tenekedjiev**
Field: Decision Analysis/Statistics
Host institution in the US: SUNY Binghamton University, New York, NY
- 4. Irena Dineva**
Field: Geology
Host institution in the US: University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
- 5. Gergana Apostolova**
Field: Philosophy
Host institution in the US: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
- 6. Plamen Chipev**
Field: Economics
Host institution in the US: University of Missouri - Kansas City, MO.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

- 1. Alexandra Mechkova**
Field: Media and Communication Studies
Host institution in the US: Emerson College, Boston, MA
- 2. Tihomir Tsenkulovski**
Field: Economics/International Trade
Host institution in the US: Tufts University, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Medford, MA

3. Nadezhda Varbanova

Field: Law

Host institution in the US: Harvard, Law School, Cambridge, MA

4. Boyan Konstantinov

Field: Law (Public Service Law)

Host institution in the US: Columbia University, Law School, New York, NY

5. Maria Mihaleva

Field: Law

Host institution in the US: Columbia University, Law School, New York, NY

6. Atanas Chobanov

Field: Business Administration

Host institution in the US: Oklahoma University, Norman, OK

7. Nikolai Yanev

Field: Law ("Thanks to Scandinavia" Grant)

Host institution in the US: Columbia University, Law School, New York, NY

8. Polyana Ilieva

Field: Cultural Anthropology

Host institution in the US: SUNY, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY

9. Alexandra Bizerova

Field: Business Administration

Host institution in the US: Emory University, Atlanta, GA

HUBERT H. HUMPHREY FELLOWSHIP

1. Christina Popivanova

Field: Public Policy Analysis

Host institution in the US: University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN



NEW CENTURY SCHOLARS

1. Prof. Pepka Boyadjieva

Field: Education,

NCS seminars: Buffalo, NY; Sao Paolo, Brazil; Washington D.C

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

1. Anna Marinova

Field: School Principal, "Vassil Aprilov" National High School, Gabrovo

Host institution in the US: "Freire Charter School", Philadelphia, PA

TEACHERS

1. Elka Vesselinova

Field: English as a Foreign Language

Host institution in the US: "Robert Gray Middle School", Portland, OR

2. Natasha Krumova

Field: English as a Foreign Language

Host institution in the US: "Park High School", Livingston, MT

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

NAFSA 2007 Annual Conference & Expo Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, May 27 - June 1



Fulbright Executive Directors

Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission and educational advisor Snezhana Teneva participated in the annual NAFSA conference on "Shaping the Future of International Education". The conference took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 27-June 1, 2007.

Over 7,000 international education professionals from more than 90 countries took part in the event to advance the causes of education abroad, international student and scholar advising, campus internationalization, and so on.

The 2007 Conference included 200 concurrent sessions, 56 workshops, 4 dynamic plenary speakers, and a wealth of networking opportunities. The conference plenary speakers General L. Powell, USA (Ret.), J. Brian Atwood, Jack Weatherford, and Kishore Mahbubani discussed the complexities of global forces affecting international education and exchange. The preconference workshops were designed to be interactive and participatory either through hands-on learning or through presentations with opportunities for lively discussion and a question-and-answer period. More than 200 concurrent conference sessions were offered and were open to all conference registrants. Topics included campus internationalization, administration and design of programs in education abroad, outcomes of international

education and exchange, the education trends and systems of countries around the world, regional developments such as the Bologna process, institutional linkages, U.S. immigration policy and practice, cross-cultural and technical skills.

On May 27 Dr. Julia Stefanova took part in a one-day Executive Directors' meeting. Prior to NAFSA she visited Washington D.C. where she met with officers from ECA, CIES, IIE and reported on the activities of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission at a meeting of the Fulbright Scholarship Board.

NAFSA also offered a valuable opportunity for adviser professional development and networking. As part of the Pre-NAFSA Campus Visit Program and USAP (United States Student Achievers Program), educational advisor Snezhana Teneva visited Marquette University, WI; Beloit College, WI; Edgewood College, WI; University of Wisconsin-Madison; University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh; Northeast Wisconsin Technical College; Laurence University, WI; St. Norbert College, WI; Lakeland College, WI; College of St. Catherine, MN; St. St. Olaf College, MN; Carleton College, MN; Smith College, MA; Amherst College, MA and Mount Holyoke College, MA.

Bulgaria was represented at OSEAS Country Fair with a special stand that was visited by over 200 participants.



Expo Hall

To Chicago and Back

The Fulbright Family

Valentina Nikolova graduated from Sofia University in 2004 with a B.A. in British and American Studies. Her ideals to bring social change and equity lead her to pursue a master program in Sustainable Development or Public Policy. Currently, she is enrolled as a Fulbright graduate student in Duke University's Master of Public Policy program.

The Fulbright experience is more than a scholarship and a degree - it is a lifetime membership into a global family. Recently I was invited and took part in a Fulbright enrichment seminar in Washington, DC. I had to take days off from school and therefore went on to ask my teachers for permission. It turned out my professor in microeconomics has been a Fulbrighter herself - three times: New Zealand, South Africa and England. Immediately there was a bond and we went on to talk of her and my experiences. The Cost-Benefit analysis is still hard, but now the teacher behind the theory has a different face - that of a Fulbrighter.

Indeed the most valuable part of my Fulbright experience is the people I meet. The Fulbright-related friendships are for life. The Fulbrighters I met in Bulgaria in 2005 are still dear friends. Whether they relocated to New York or Nairobi, we are still in touch and cherishing the common memories from Sofia and the Fulbright Summer Institute in Pamporovo. We spent Thanksgiving together both in Sofia and in Washington, DC, we spent Easter together in Gabrovo.

Some of the people I met at the Gateway orientation in Miami upon my arrival last August were at the enrichment seminar in Washington two weeks ago. Needless to say - there were good times to be had! What is more, the seminar participants now have two internet groups. One of the groups is for all the participants and the other - for people interested in Sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The latter gives us the opportunity to exchange ideas, readings and resources.

The pool of Fulbrighters present at any gathering is a powerful source of inspiration and information. There is nothing more inspiring than a group of 150 people from 100 countries and 50 leading universities brought together. The energy at those



gatherings gives you the idea that everything is possible, that the world problems are soon to disappear. Among us there are urban planners, lawyers, economists, anthropologists, policy analysts and fish experts. We represent countries as diverse as Burkina Faso, Nicaragua and Tobago and Trinidad. Our areas of interest spread over education, health care and developmental psychology. We have worked for the Red Cross, the World Bank and USAID. We are simply - Fulbrighters.

The enrichment seminar in Washington had the title of 'Leadership and Public Service'. The speakers it featured were from leading organizations in the field of social entrepreneurship and policy research - Ashoka, Grameen Foundation, The Urban Institute. It also turned out that the Nobel Peace Prize winner from last year - Muhammad Yunus, the founder of Grameen Microfinance Banks in Bangladesh - was a Fulbrighter in the US. In turn the current CEO of Grameen Foundation, and a speaker at the seminar, Alex Counts, was a Fulbrighter in Bangladesh. Such examples give you a sense of belonging to a select community of people that want and do change the world we live in. It gives you optimism and belief in your own work and research. As I am writing this essay I am organizing a Microfinance panel in an upcoming conference at Duke University. Among the speakers we have: the Bishop of Rwanda, a survivor of the massacres and an ambassador of peace and prosperity for the poor, members of Grameen and the World Bank.

I am honored to be part of a community that aspires for a more equitable global society and I would have been much less empowered to make a change if I have not become one of the members of the Fulbright family.

Out of America

Churches, Mosques, and Monasteries

Linda Stump Rashidi received her PhD in theoretical linguistics from Michigan State University. She teaches linguistics and comparative literature at Mansfield University of Pennsylvania. In the fall of 2006 Dr. Rashidi taught linguistics at the Department of English and American Studies of Sofia University as a visiting Fulbright lecturer.

Part of my decision to choose Bulgaria as my Fulbright destination is my constant fascination with all things religious, especially the architecture of religion. And Bulgaria is one of the richest of religious places. Though Orthodoxy is the religion of Bulgaria and a crucial piece of the Bulgarian identity, Islam remains firmly wedged into the national landscape. Churches are everywhere, and everywhere open to the public. Monasteries in general, and their chapels in particular, are great tourist attractions which the monks are not hesitant to exploit. More surprising, at least to someone who has spent time in the Islamic world, is the openness of the mosques. And whether church or mosque, the structures are definitely Bulgarian.

My first encounter with Bulgarian Orthodox churches came in the first few days of arriving in Sofia. In the lobby of the Hotel Ganesha, the official landing spot for Fulbrighters and FISI instructors, I ran into Noemi Marin who was also heading up to Borovets for the Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI), she as an instructor. Noemi is a fascinating woman of Romanian descent who grew up in the Orthodox religion. She was headed off to do the rounds of all the churches in Sofia, so I tagged along. This proved interesting and educational. An Orthodox Christian (with a Jewish mother), Noemi knew the routine, as well as the location of even small, hidden churches off the tourist route. At each she lit candles for both the living and the dead, and then did the various stations. Open and chatty, she had no qualms about explaining the customs and practices to me as she did so. In the tiny Chapel of Sveta Petka, we put some holy water in our water bottles; and at the huge Church of Sveti Georgi, Noemi bought some blessed bread which we ate as our lunch. The most magnificent of all, of course, is Nevski Cathedral with its vast interior spaces; but it is also the least personal, more like an official rotunda. In the crypt, however, is an icon museum. Though I had been fascinated by icons in Greece and spent an afternoon with an icon painter on Rhodes, this historical display made me rethink my notion of icon. As a Protestant raised on images of Jesus as a living, breathing man, the status of spirituality given to an icon took some readjustment. Each icon has a story to tell beyond its symbolic value. By the time we exited the crypt, I was fairly well-versed on the different saints, the periods, and the different ethnic influences.



Nearly two weeks later, I was at the Rila Monastery. I was better prepared for this experience than I was for my whirlwind tour of Sofia's churches. In the days leading up to our organized outing, Boyan Dobrev had carefully coached our small Cultural class on icons, the iconostasis, and monasteries themselves. We had reviewed Boyan's amazing interactive CD several times, and I felt like I had already been there, had seen the monastery, its frescoes, and its architecture. Besides, it is Rila that is pictured everywhere as a symbol of Bulgaria itself. I was prepared to be disappointed, but Rila is every bit as amazing as its hype. We arrived on a tour bus with a tour guide who had given us the usual instructions and warnings: no visitors in the galleries, the tower is closed, stay with me at all times. But Boyan, who had videotaped the monastery in detail, had an agenda of his own, and I kept at his side. Despite our intensive preparation, I stood in awe when we actually entered the chapel; every inch is covered with paintings of saints and Biblical scenes. The iconostasis, sweeping along the entire front of the church, is overlaid in gold, a truly magnificent glitter. The icons exuded a mystery in their dull glow beneath all that gold. We didn't linger, however, as Boyan's real destination was the 14th century tower. Our tour guide had said it was now closed, and even Boyan had been doubtful, but there were people climbing the rickety wooden stairs, so we plunged after them. Entering the actual tower, there were five more flights, up dark, earthen steps lighted only at each landing by narrow slots. At the top is a tiny chapel, Boyan's ultimate goal; the frescoes had been partially destroyed and entirely plastered over at one point, but still, it was lovely, an older, softer version of the magnificence below. It felt like a rare treat to see all of this.

A week later, we were on our way down the mountain out of Borovets for good; we stopped in Samokov for lunch and a visit to the mosque. At one point Samokov had numerous mosques; the Bairakli jamiyat is the only one remaining, and is no longer used for worship, so we got to go in, and without even taking our shoes off. Like much religious in Bulgaria, this mosque is an amazing mixture of cultures and religions, with both Orthodox and Jewish influences. For starters, the place is covered with fleur de lei but no arabesques; and then there are the soft pastels so unlike the brilliant colors of the mosques of my past

experience. Its architecture is that of an Orthodox church with a high dome in the center. On the underside of the dome is a painted sun symbol, looking for all the world like the Star of David. Only the presence of a mihrab, the alcove that orients worshippers to Mecca, gives any hint that this is a mosque. Opposite this alcove is a high wooden balcony where the women worshipped, very Jewish but certainly not orthodox Islam. The minaret is not recognizably so, but looks like a church spire. The Bulgarian influences are obvious.

In my first few weeks in Sofia, I organized my plentiful free time around surveying the religious establishments. Sofia's mosque is similar to the Bairakli jamiyat, but this one is an actual working Mosque, whose call-to-prayer has caused some stir and political controversy, I understand. I visited it on a warm afternoon in September, following in on the heels of a group of tourists. Not only did I have to leave my sandals at the entrance, but I was made to enshroud myself in a blue robe with hood. I stayed only long enough to observe the women's balcony, the pastel colors, and the floral decoration.

Though my attempts to visit the synagogue have been unsuccessful, I think I have been in every church in the city at least once. My favorite is the one right in my own neighborhood, Sveti Sedmochislentsi, "Holy Seven" referring to the brothers Cyril and Methodius of Cyrillic script fame, plus their followers. This is a beautiful church situated in the park behind the open air veggie/fruit market on Graf Ignatiev. It was originally a mosque called the Black Mosque, and immediately after liberation from the Ottomans (1878) the edifice was converted to a prison. Despite its checkered history, the building has a lovely peacefulness about it. The outside is ornately striped in brick and sandstone with multiple domes, the main one big and bulbous, the front dome rising up over the trees of the park. The church was completely redesigned at the beginning of the 20th century; its unusual features include a clock which seems to work and below it a mosaic mural of the seven holies in a Last Supper-like montage with Jesus. Inside, every inch is covered with paintings, icons, and gilt and silver. The underside of the huge central dome is black with soot, but one can faintly make out an image of Christ.

On my second visit, I happened upon a service in progress. This seemed quite different from those of Western Christianity. There are no pews inside the vast interior, and the church is open most of the day; people wander in and out at will, lighting candles, genuflecting before various stations, and kissing and touching the different icons. But during a service, priests are present. On my first chance visit, on a Friday evening, two priests were at a lectern reading from a book, but they were chanting the scripture in a choral-response fashion, one the leader and the other the responder. At the same time, a head priest wearing an ornate robe over his black garments was at the very front before the iconostasis. He apparently had a separate script that he followed. He moved from one station to another, doing his independent chanting. At one point he picked up a staff and carried it from place to place; then he went behind the altar, which is hidden in back of the iconostasis. When he came back out a bit later, he opened the doors to the altar, moved inside and, with his back to us, picked up a chalice, crossed himself, and carried out other rituals that were not easy to discern. Going back inside, he reappeared with a brass incense burner on a chain which, moving about the church, he swung in the direction of various worshippers. It all seemed mysterious to me, and I have been told that the language of the church is Old Bulgarian, which few Bulgarians today understand. The effect, however, was deeply spiritual and highly personal. In a sense, this is an individual worship where each can enter into the ceremony however she (and the others in the church were mostly women) feels moved to do so. I, a stranger, did not feel out of place in the

least as people entered the church, moved about, stood wherever they chose, or sat quietly on one of the wooden chairs at the back.

Every weekend there is at least one wedding taking place in this church-and again, while the service itself is, I suppose, private, people just wander into and out of the church while the priest is marrying the couple. On a Saturday in mid-September, I heard the wedding before I saw it; while the couple was inside, a crowd had gathered in the park as a band played at the entrance to the church. This band consisted of about six men all in white suits, playing brass instruments and clanging cymbals; it was loud and lively! They had pulled into the park in a black limo and with them were two women in sexy black outfits who danced as the men played. Eventually, other women, in their church best, joined a horo line that snaked around the park. After about 20 minutes, the priest and then the couple emerged from the church, rice was thrown, pictures were snapped, and then the couple got into an ordinary black car with balloons attached and drove off. These weddings seem less elaborate to me than those in the US; they certainly take less time and involve fewer members of the party. I haven't seen what look like bridesmaids, only, in every instance, a 5-6 year-old girl in a very elaborate white dress-flower girl? The bride on this occasion wore a typical white wedding dress with flowers in her hair (no veil), and the groom was in a light suit with black shirt and no tie. The bride carried no flowers, but others standing around outside the church had bouquets and some had loaves or rings of fancy bread.

Probably Bulgaria's most famous church is the one in Boyana. Though only in the suburbs of Sofia, getting there without a car is difficult. But I have now been there twice. My first excursion was a chance one. On the last day of September-and the last day of the Thracian gold exhibit at the National History Museum, also in Boyana-a fellow linguist from Sofia University, Andrei Stoevsky, called to ask if I would like to go see the Thracian gold. It was only as we were heading back to his ancient Lada after two hours in the museum that he asked, almost casually, if I would like to go on out to Boyana Church. I had been lusting after a peek at this famous site since I arrived in Bulgaria. Andrei had been in numerous times and opted to sit outside, but I eagerly paid my 10 leva and followed a woman into the tiny, tiny sacred space. One is allotted only 10 minutes inside in order to preserve the frescoes, but I was the only tourist that day and my guide was new in her role, hesitant in her English, and seemed anxious that I saw and understood every detail. Inside are three tiny rooms, the most inner and oldest still under restoration and filled with scaffolding. Nonetheless, I was in awe. Often I find I am disappointed by highly hyped historic places, but Boyana lives up to its reputation. The whole church is painted floor to ceiling with amazing frescoes; in places you can see the earlier frescoes in layers, like peeling back the history of the church. But the most amazing is the figures themselves: they are real people with lifelike features, not the set icons that are so much a part of Orthodox churches. And this was before the Renaissance, before DiVinci, before Michelangelo. Better than the Thracian gold.

My second visit was in December with my fellow Fulbrighters. By this time, the restoration work had been completed and the scaffolding removed-and our guide was the curator of the church who is himself a national icon. He had his patter down pat, but it was no less interesting and more informative than my first visit. This time I paid special attention to Desislava, her eyes and beauty equal to those of the Mona Lisa.

Another Fulbright outing took us to the Glozhene Monastery. Situated high up on a mountain peak, it can be reached only by a narrow, one-lane road that winds around and around the mountain for half an

hour, a steep bank on one side and a very long drop on the other. At the top, the view was magnificent. The day was cloudy, but on a clear day, one can see well, not forever, but the Danube. This place has a story. Dedicated to St. George, an icon of him was carried all the way from the Ukraine. Shortly after the establishment of the original monastery (further down the mountain) in the 13th c., this icon repeatedly disappeared from the cloister, only to be found later on at the very top of the mountain. So the monks built another monastery on the top, as a sign from God. The monk relating this, a sober young man in topknot and black cassock over his sneakers and sweatpants, did not blink an eye when he confirmed that each year the icon is taken to the original site, and each year it mysteriously makes its way back up to the top. When we toured the tiny but lovely church, the icon was snugly in its place. I think I saw St. George's youthful face wink at me.

Though there are more monastery and church stories to be told, I have become persistent in my quest of mosques. And the one I have most wanted to see is the one in Plovdiv. On a previous visit to Plovdiv, the mosque was obviously under restoration and attempts to penetrate the scaffolding proved fruitless, but on a sunny day in late November, I traveled to Plovdiv with Christo Stamenov, my counterpart at Sofia University, to give a lecture for his class in lexicography at the University of Plovdiv. Having arrived early, we sat in the sun and drank coffee and then strolled to the end of the pedestrian mall. As Christo and I circled around this tempting 13-15th c. landmark, I noticed a large door was open and we climbed the steep stone steps. Gingerly picking our way over construction debris, we tentatively stepped into the entrance. Workmen were up on scaffolds under the huge domes; across the vast interior space, we saw a young man in blue work clothes, who immediately spotted and made his way toward us. Christo said, "Hm, I think we may be asked to leave." But the handsome young man turned out to be the imam. He greeted us and then gently invited us in. I ventured a "salam alaikum" and he politely nodded. He showed us around, pointing out the highlights, telling stories, answering questions, and proudly explaining the role of Turkey in this restoration project, addressing Christo exclusively-ah, shades of Islam even here in the Balkans. The mosque is similar in style to the one in Samokov, only larger with massive arches: lots of floral decorations, and a back wooden balcony, the colors all pastels of robin's egg blue and peach, so strange to my eye attuned to the brilliant cobalt blues of mosques in the Islamic world.

Bulgaria's largest mosque is the Tombul jamiyat in Shumen. The day I was there in mid-December the city was enshrouded in fog. Even so, one could see this landmark from blocks away. This mosque encompasses a large area that holds a complex of buildings as well as the mosque itself. It was a chilly day with patches of snow, and both the courtyards and the prayer hall interior were damp and frigid. Even so, I took off my shoes and stepped onto what looked like new carpet decorated with a brightly-colored pattern of "prayer rugs." Shumen's once-large Muslim community has dwindled, but the mosque, converted to a museum during the Communist era, is once again a major Muslim center of worship and gathering. Nonetheless, unlike any other mosque I have ever been in, this one had an entrance fee with postcards for sale, a holdover, I suppose, from its days as a museum.

Perhaps the mosques that capture my heart the most are the least fancy or historic. On a trip on the narrow-gauge railway from Bansko to Velingrad, we passed village after village with small community mosques. They looked strange structures indeed: the minaret, shooting into the sky like a space rocket, seemed detached from any mosque at all, but next to each of these tall, narrow silos was what looked like a three-story apartment house and was, I assume, the mosque, all modern and

new and painted in ochre yellow.

Then in mid-January, I traveled to Veliko Turnovo. Though none of the linguists with whom I was interacting had ever seen it, there is a mosque not far from the university in what they referred to as the "Turkish Quarter." So on my last day at Veliko Turnovo University, I descended the university mountain by its back door, following the cobbled road that winds down into the Yantra river valley. I knew I was in Muslim territory by the dogs: instead of the placid creatures that loll along the streets all over the country, these were huge, snarling guard dogs that leapt at gates as I passed. Like the mosques in the Pirin Mountains, this one looked brand new. Its needle-nosed minaret was definitely attached, but seemed almost an afterthought. The mosque itself looked more a house than a place of worship, no dome, all square corners. The courtyard had a row of spigots for ritual washing, but it also held a fountain with entwined cherubs. I was definitely not in Morocco. Nobody was about and I did not enter.

Though my travels around Bulgaria have not always taken the usual path, there was one place I had not been that I regretted, and that was Melnik. Thus, I was delighted when Rada announced that the February outing would be a trip to Melnik. Melnik is famous for its local wine and sandstone cliffs, but its real gem is the nearby Rozhen monastery. One of Bulgaria's oldest, this monastery is set on a plateau high in the hills with commanding views of the mountains and cliffs that stretch to the Greek border. The compound itself is a simple, austere place, but its chapel is the most interesting I have yet been in. Before even entering the church, one gets a glimpse of what lies in store inside. Under the wide porch overhang, there are murals on each side of the entrance door. The one to the left is an unusual scene, indeed: *Judgment Day* shows a ladder connecting heaven and an enormous, red worm-like monster. On the right side of the ladder, the righteous are being assisted up toward heaven by angels; both the angels, who are crowning the blessed as they ascend, and the climbers are distinct figures in full, brightly-colored garments. On the left are the damned being dragged into hell by nebula-like figures, featureless creatures who reach out with long tentacle appendages to strip the damned of their clothes and push them into the pit of the writhing serpent below. It is a gripping mural. Just inside the chapel itself is a figure of the Archangel Michael, sword in hand, foot on the sprawled body of a damned woman; she, too, is nearly featureless, but a silent scream is eerily evident on her face.

The church's murals are less iconic than the usual Orthodox depictions, the people more real. And the iconostasis is a mass of tiny scenes, each painted in exquisite detail on the wooden structure without the usual gold overlay. These miniatures tell their stories so realistically that one can almost hear the words. Along the left wall of the church, in the middle of a long row of larger than life figures in flowing robes, is one figure with a sheep's head. Two figures down is a woman. I wish I knew the story of these two. Perhaps the most striking image, however, is an icon of the Virgin Mary. While definitely an icon, this Virgin has a personality. Dressed in lush red, her glance, direct and mysterious, is alluring. Not your usual Icon of the Virgin. It was difficult to leave this chapel. I lit two candles for the living, and then quietly backed out, giving this lovely painted interior one last glance.

For one small country, tucked into the mountains of Eastern Europe, Bulgaria is a treasure-trove of religious beauty. I suppose that the natural beauty that surrounds these religious sites has, through the ages, given inspiration to the creators of these monuments to spirituality.



Out of America

Victor Primov, AY 2006-2007 Fulbright student in "Bulgarian Energy Policies and 21st Century Realities" at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Resources, Sofia, Bulgaria

The Fulbright Grant has given me tremendous opportunities and I want to thank the Fulbright Program and express my profound and deep appreciation for this grant. It has helped me experience the new, yet the ancient culture of Bulgaria from a crucial and exciting region in Europe, as well as opening numerous doors for me. It is my hope to be able to give back to American society some day to show my gratitude.

The Fulbright Grant has awarded me the once in a life time opportunity to be in Bulgaria and assess the impact of energy security on the country, region, US and EU interests that are all coinciding. With a background in international relations and political science, the Fulbright Grant is helping me make the natural progression of understanding the crucial area of energy security, a crucial area for any country and especially the US. The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission has done a fantastic job in my placement with the Bulgarian Ministry of Economy and Energy, giving me the tremendous benefit of combining research with an internship at the institution at the forefront of energy policy and innovation for the country and the region.

Being in the Ministry is helping me gain valuable insights of Bulgarian and regional energy security issues, while saving me a lot of time and difficulties on conducting the research. For instance, as opposed to having to look daily and spend hours looking through every single newspaper, magazine and journal for articles on energy security issues, I get them in the daily news briefing or the "Klyukarka"/"The Gossip" that the Ministry compiles on a daily basis. Rather than trying to figure out where and how to find an energy expert and perhaps taking weeks at a time to arrange a meeting, I work with most of the experts, and if I need additional contacts, my coworkers are very happy to help. Through this terrific placement, I have also received the opportunity to work closely with senior officials at the Ministry, including the Deputy Minister. I am able to give my input on energy policy and raise my opinions to senior officials. Furthermore, the Ministry has expressed its readiness to invite me, where possible to participate in official delegations. Indeed, recently they made good on this promise by allowing me to participate on the Annual Athens Energy Forum, a very high level regional body on energy issues, bringing together governments, energy suppliers, customers, regulators, members of the South East European region electricity free market, as well as delegates from USAID, the European Commission and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This was an event at the highest level and the Ministry was able to include me in the official delegation, which is a tremendous honor, privilege and opportunity for me. At the same time, the Ministry has promised to add me to any other events and/or delegations where I could be included. Attending these events has given me further opportunities to network with various high level officials and gain a better understanding of energy security issues relating to Bulgaria, the region, US and EU interests. The placement has also allowed me to act as a liaison between the Ministry and the US Embassy.

The Fulbright Grant and the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission's excellent placement at the Ministry of Economy and Energy has been an invaluable experience for me, and I am profoundly grateful to the Fulbright Program for making so many opportunities for me possible. In addition to helping me gain invaluable insights on energy security issues, the Fulbright Program is awarding me the opportunity to witness Bulgaria's impressive transformation. After having the dubious "pleasure" of being under an illegitimate, dictatorial and repressive communist regime for about fifty years, the country is experiencing democracy, free markets, being a member of NATO, and as of January 1, 2007 a full and formal membership of the European Union all at the same time. To say the least, this is a very exciting time to be in Bulgaria, and being able to witness these revolutionary and dizzying changes in person, is a once in a lifetime experience, which I owe to the generosity of the Fulbright Grant and the Fulbright Program.

I am also able to experience the richness of Bulgarian history and culture. From visiting the ancient cities of Veliko Tarnovo and Plovdiv, the Rila and Bachkovo Monasteries that shock the senses with their architectural grandeur and historic wanders, to the extraordinary beauty of the mountains of Borovets and the Moussallah Peak, I have been truly touched by the experience of being in Bulgaria so far. I have been able to enjoy theaters, operas, the mesmerizing beats of the "horos" folk dance with dozens of people, to dancing the night away to "chalga" music in night clubs. Further, I have experienced the dazzles of Bulgarian cuisine such as "banitsa" (layers of very thin pastry filled with cheese, meat or pumpkin and baked to perfection) as well as "gyuvech" (a tasty baked dish with a variety of vegetables with marinated meat prepared slowly and delighting the taste buds) as well as "shkembe chorba" or tripe soup. Wine making in Bulgaria goes back to 6,000 years, and needless to say Bulgarian wines are fantastic. In Bulgaria I have also learned to appreciate the fine taste of "rakiya" (a type of brandy sipped with salad with family and/or close friends), home made or store bought as well. Its strong taste, takes some getting used to but as the rest of Bulgaria, it grows on to you little by little where at first you are surprised but then you learn to appreciate it and really like it.

Being in Bulgaria so far has been a very positive experience. I am able to conduct interesting research and my placement is working out quite well. The Fulbright Grant is opening numerous doors for me even while I am at the middle of my studies. In addition to that, I am having the opportunity to really get to know Bulgaria as the country goes through revolutionary changes and get to know its culture, history and traditions. I owe all of this and so much more to the generosity of the Fulbright Program for which I am deeply grateful. I look forward to completing a successful year and proceeding forward with my Fulbright research.

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