

13th Fulbright International Summer Institute

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Official FISI Opening

From right to left, Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Fulbright Commission; Natalia Miteva, Director, Programs for Education and Libraries at the America for Bulgaria Foundation

The thirteenth Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) organized by the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission took place at RIU Pravets Resort on August 10-23, 2014. One hundred and five students from Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Germany, Greece, India, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, Slovakia, and the USA took part in the Institute. Among the participants were doctoral and postdoctoral students from the Alma Mater Centre of Excellence at Sofia University, who attended courses and participated in a research forum. Master's students from the program in cultural diplomacy and the program in communication, language and literature, both offered at Sofia University, also enrolled in various courses and received credits for the classes they had selected. A special feature of FISI 2014 was the series of lectures delivered by the Ambassadors of Turkey, Palestine, Israel and Indonesia to the Republic of Bulgaria. They presented their countries foreign policy and answered students' questions.

Twenty-seven BA students from the University of Michigan (Ross School of Business) led by Professor George Siedel attended his course on Negotiation and Conflict Resolution and participated in a special program that involved meetings with prominent Bulgarian entrepreneurs and visits to business companies. The new group of American Fulbright scholars and graduate students had the opportunity to attend an intensive two-week course in Bulgarian language.

FISI offered a total of 13 interdisciplinary courses conducted by 14 distinguished professors and experts from prestigious universities and institutions such as Harvard University, University of Michigan, University of Massachusetts Boston, Arizona State University, University of Dayton, Sofia University, New Bulgarian University, University of Veliko Turnovo, University of Peshawar, Monmouth College, Communications and Human Resources Development Center and the European Parliament.

A visit to the Saeva Dupka Cave and a walking tour of Sofia gave FISI participants a glimpse of the beautiful nature and Bulgaria's rich cultural heritage. Classical music lovers had the chance to enjoy the opera Don Giovanni (Rousse State Opera, conductor Martin Panteleev) and symphonic works of Mozart, Rimski-Korsakov and Richard Strauss (Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor Nayden Todorov) at the lake stage of RIU Pravets Resort as part of the tenth edition of the annual Mozart Festival.

Special recognition and gratitude is due to America for Bulgaria Foundation, and Sofia University for their generous financial support.

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FISI participants



FISI class



FISI class



FISI class



H.E. Süleyman Gökçe, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the Republic of Bulgaria



H.E. Shaul Kamisa Raz, Ambassador of the State of Israel to the Republic of Bulgaria



H.E. Bunyan Saptomo, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the Republic of Bulgaria and Republic of Albania



H. E. Dr. Ahmed Mohamad Al-Mathboub, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the Republic of Bulgaria



Trip to Telerik-Bulgaria



Trip to Saeva Dupka Cave



Golf course at Pravets Golf Club



Sofia walking tour



Farewell party



Farewell party



FISI Closing



Awarding certificates to 2014 FISI graduates



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Orientation for Fulbright ETAs September 1-10, Sofia, 2014



Official Opening of the Orientation for the English Teaching Assistants
From left to right: Prof. Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Fulbright Commission; Natalia Miteva, Director, Programs for Education and Libraries at the America for Bulgaria Foundation

Fulbright English Teaching Assistants, AY 2014-2015

Fulbright English Teaching Assistants for AY 2014-2015 received their in-country orientation and training on Sep 1-10, 2014, at Vitosha Park Hotel in Sofia.

Foundation, CORPlus Foundation and American Corners. Some of the activities presented were running an English tests preparation club, starting a speech and debate team, serving as an information resource person for college application and exchange programs' consultations, helping as a judge or a reader at national English speaking school competitions.

After offering a one-day pilot ETA Training as part of the "100 Days in Bulgaria" meeting in 2012, and a two-week one during the Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) in 2013, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission now offers its ETAs an intensive training program specifically designed to prepare them for their role in Bulgaria both professionally and culturally. The program featured presentations, workshops and cultural events.

The core of the training program were the practical workshops covering a range of vital topics – lesson planning, classroom management, teaching a multilevel classroom, teaching literature, the Bulgarian grading system, administrative organization and specific documentation in a Bulgarian school, use of technology in and out of the classroom. The workshops were led by ETA mentors Margarita Dobрева, Ludmilla Hvalabogova and Ludmilla Teneva, "Teach for Bulgaria" English teacher Stanimira Paskova, ETA alumni Sophia Kleinsasser, Hannah Allen and Michael Deegan, and returning ETAs Sarah Craycraft, Blaine Carper, Morgan Murphy and Athena Lao. All new ETAs had the opportunity to practice what they had learnt so far by presenting a short mock lesson and receiving feedback on their style and methods by peers, ETA alumni and Fulbright staff.

The program started with an official address by Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, and Natalia Miteva, Director, Programs for Education and Libraries, America for Bulgaria Foundation. Next were the presentations "Bulgaria at a Glance" by Dr. Julia Stefanova, and "Fulbright English Teaching Assistants to Bulgaria", delivered by Fulbright program officers Rada Kaneva and Iliana Dimitrova. After lunch all ETAs participated in a round-table discussion on cultural adjustment in Bulgaria, led by Fulbright staff and ETA alumni. Over the course of the training program, ETAs were introduced to various opportunities for extracurricular activities by presenters from partner organizations such as EducationUSA, BEST

The Fulbright Commission is especially thankful to the Regional English Language Office in Budapest, Hungary, for their support and for sending Regional English Language



U.S. Embassy briefing with Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, Counselor for Public Affairs and Chairperson of The Fulbright Commission Board, and Richard Seipert, Deputy Regional Security Officer



Morgan Murphy, second year ETA at Foreign Language High School, Pleven



Bulgarian Language classes, with Zhana Zagorova and Radost Sabeva, former Peace Corps instructors



Classroom Management with Sophia Kleinsasser, Fulbright ETA alumna, Stanimira Paskova, an English Teacher at Zaedno v chas/ Teach for Bulgaria, and Hannah Allen, Fulbright ETA alumna



Classroom management practice



Mock lesson

Officer (RELO), George Chinnery and English Language Fellows (ELF), Kate Mulvey and Daniel Perez, who prepared the last two days of programming. The English Language specialists introduced ETAs and their Bulgarian mentor teachers to various teaching resources, most popular teaching methods, ways to increase student participation in the classroom and the use of modern technology in and out of class.

Another very important part of the ETA training program this year were the intensive Bulgarian language classes, delivered by former Peace Corps instructors Radost Sabeva and Zhana Zagorova. The cultural events for the new Fulbright ETAs included a guided tour of Sofia and a guided day-trip to the city of Plovdiv, as well as a traditional Bulgarian dinner and a firewalking show. The training program concluded with a

reception hosted by the main sponsor of the ETA program in Bulgaria, the America for Bulgaria Foundation.

Special guests and speakers to the event were Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, Counselor for Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy, and Chairperson of The Fulbright Commission Board, Richard Seipert, Deputy Regional Security Officer, U.S. Embassy, Natalia Miteva, Director, Programs for Education and Libraries, America for Bulgaria Foundation, Ana Todorcheva, Cultural Affairs Assistant, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy and John D'Amicantonio, Information Resource Officer, U.S. Embassy, Vienna.

Special recognition and gratitude is due to America for Bulgaria Foundation and the Embassy of the United States of America for their generous financial support.



"Increasing Conversation in the Classroom" workshop



Dr. Julia Stefanova introducing Kate Mulvey, English Language Fellow, Pristina, Kosovo, Daniel Perez, English Language Fellow, Prague, Czech Republic, and George Chinnery, Regional English Language Officer, Budapest, Hungary



One-day trip to Plovdiv



Restaurant Vodenitzata, Dragalevtsi

Fulbright Office News

Europe and Eurasia Regional Forum in Tbilisi, Georgia September 21-25, 2014

The 2014 Europe and Eurasia Regional Forum was held in Tbilisi, Georgia, on September 21-25. The EducationUSA advisers from Europe and Eurasia discussed the most crucial topics in international education and exchange today, from international admissions and study abroad to global education trends and international education policy. A major highlight of the conference was the Country Fair which featured exhibitors representing the participating countries. EducationUSA adviser Snezhana Teneva attended the forum and made use of the many opportunities to obtain new information, network and promote EducationUSA and Bulgarian education. Bulgaria was represented at the Country Fair with a special stand, visited by over 30 participants.



EducationUSA Adviser Snezhana Teneva at the Bulgarian booth, Country Fair

Outreach Activities



Information session for young Bulgarian scholars conducted by Maria Kostova, program officer for Bulgarian grantees, at the Fulbright Training Center

On September 16, 2014, an information session for young Bulgarian scholars was held at the Fulbright Training Center. The audience consisted of PhD students and assistant lecturers from the PhD Students' Forum at the University Research Complex "Alma Mater". The participants, representatives of Sofia University and the University of National and World Economy, covered an array of scientific fields: political science, law, history, philosophy, literature, psychology and tourism. Program officer Maria Kostova presented the Fulbright grant opportunities for doctoral students and visiting scholars for AY 2016-17. After an animated discussion of application procedures and project preparation, there is nothing but to wish all future candidates good luck!

U.S. University Presentations



How to apply to Harvard College Webinar, conducted by ETA Rebecca Margolies



NYUAD and Wellesley College presentations at the Fulbright Advising Center

To Chicago and Back

Todor Raykov

**MS student, Innovation Management & Entrepreneurship
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ochridski", Sofia, Bulgaria**

**Host institution in the US: Fox School of Business and Management at Temple University, PA, USA
AY 2013-14**

My journey from Sofia to Philadelphia, where I study Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship at Temple University's Fox School of Business, began in 2007 when I decided to start a political Internet blog. It was one of those moments that change, stir, or even decide the fate of a person.

In the summer of 2007, I published my first article on the political apathy amongst the Bulgarian youth, just several days after the completion of my freshman year at Sofia University where I pursued a degree in Political Science. My article became one of most widely read and acclaimed in the then incipient Bulgarian blogosphere. This auspicious debut motivated me to come up with more publications discussing the gloomy future before the young generation of Bulgarians and the steps that the said generation requires to attain a better lot in life.

Gradually, my blog gained publicity and was noticed by several prominent Bulgarian politicians. One of them, Mr. Teodor Detchev, former Deputy Labor Minister of Bulgaria, an advocate of small and medium sized enterprises and an ardent blogger, liked my articles and invited me to join his team at the Union for Private Economic Enterprise. This is the first employers' organization formed after the fall of communism in the country. My stay there changed profoundly not only my professional, but also my personal goals. The interaction with successful entrepreneurs triggered in me the desire to start my own business and help others do the same.

In the spring of 2009, I headed a group of young entrepreneurs and we established an association, aimed at fostering entrepreneurship amongst the Bulgarian youth and at building bridges between the universities, the business sector, and the student community. This youth structure provides pro-bono legal and administrative assistance for young people who are willing to start their own companies. Being at the helm of such an organization revealed to me some deficiencies in my knowledge about building businesses and successfully managing them. Therefore, I started looking for graduate programs in universities throughout the world that could help me augment my entrepreneurial and managerial skills. After an extensive research, I narrowed my list to only a few universities in the European Union and the USA. However, my previous experience



with non-governmental organizations and companies from Europe led me to believe that I need a radically different perspective of doing business in order to come up with ideas that could have a significant impact on the Bulgarian economy and that could lead to the growth of the entrepreneurial community in the country. I felt that I could achieve this only at a university in the USA. I applied for a Fulbright scholarship and received funding for my studies. I had to select only four institutions in the USA that offer Entrepreneurship as a graduate degree, and the Innovation Management & Entrepreneurship (IME) program at Temple University immediately caught my attention. The growing international reputation of the Fox School of Business, the excellent faculty, and the location of the university at the heart of the Mid-Atlantic region were among the main reasons for my choice. Gladly, Temple University was the first institution that accepted my application and I did not hesitate to enroll in the program.

Thus began my journey as a Fulbright scholar. Before leaving for the United States of America, the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission organized an event, which helped me acquaint myself better with the American educational system and with my rights and responsibilities as a Fulbrighter. This knowledge was further deepened by a Fulbright Gateway seminar held at Lincoln University during my first days in the US. There, I had the pleasure to meet other Fulbright scholars from around the world. We traveled together to Philadelphia and to the Amish Village in the Pennsylvania's Dutch County where we experienced the culture of the Amish people.



With other Fulbright scholars in front of the Independence Hall, where both the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence were drafted and signed.



In front of the Amish Village's Schoolhouse

Although, we spent only a few days together before we left for our respective universities, we managed to establish close ties and we still communicate regularly via the Internet. At Lincoln University, I met with Ms. Constance Lundy, Director of the Office of International Programs and Services and a Temple University's Alumna. Ms. Lundy's help was instrumental for my flawless accommodation at Temple's Main Campus. That was the first instance, when I felt the power of being part of an American university. Every time when you meet people who study at or who had graduated from the same institution, one can immediately sense that there is a bond between you and them. This is something that I have never experienced in Bulgaria and which I would like to see happen in the future in our home country.

So far, my studies at Temple University have been very demanding, but also extremely beneficial for my development as a manager and entrepreneur. Currently, Temple is one of those universities in the US, which are on the rise in national and international rankings. Most of the professors come from prestigious institutions like Harvard University and the University of Chicago and they expect their students to be at the level of the students at their alma maters. All this means that international students like myself are required to maintain high standard at all times.

Despite the high requirements, so far, I had the chance to become involved in different organizations and competitions held at the university. I am currently the President of the Graduate Student Entrepreneurship Club, member of the Marketing Commission at the Entrepreneurial Students Association, member of the Temple Slavic Association and I work closely with the Temple Young Alumni Association. I have also participated in an entrepreneurial competition at Temple University where I made it to the finals.

I intend to participate in other business competitions organized by the Fox School of Business and its Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Institute (IEI) in 2014. I am absolutely impressed by the activities of the IEI. I always try to participate in the events organized by the Institute and I also strive to garner as much know-how as possible that could later help me achieve my goal of establishing an entrepreneurship institute in Bulgaria modeled after IEI. I believe that such an institute would be very beneficial to the Bulgarian entrepreneurial community and would be a great way for me to act as a Fulbright ambassador and to implement the know-how that I have managed to acquire in the US for the improvement of Bulgaria's socio-economic situation. I encourage every Bulgarian student who is willing to contribute to his or her home country to apply for the Fulbright scholarship, to explore different cultures and to bring the best practices back to Bulgaria, because this is the only way we could make our country a better place to live and develop as professionals.



At Temple University's Annual Innovative Idea Competition

Disclaimer: The text is published in its original and unedited version.

Out of America

James J. Napoli

Fulbright scholar James J. Napoli taught international journalism at Sofia University in the fall semester of AY 2013-14. Prior to retirement, Napoli had a long career as a journalist, journalism educator, media consultant, and political analyst. He worked on a half dozen newspapers in the United States, and, while teaching at the American University in Cairo, was Cairo correspondent and columnist for The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, a Washington-based magazine that covers the region. Napoli also held a professional Fulbright grant in journalism in Pakistan in 1989.



So there I was, holding forth at Sofia University on the subject of international journalism, when a student’s hand shot up, leading to a question:

“Who’s your favorite American writer?”

“Hemingway,” I said.

“I think that Hemingway’s journalism is superior to his fiction,” he shot back.

I was chuffed. Here in deepest Bulgaria, I was engaging a student who not only was acquainted with Ernest Hemingway, but had an opinion about the relative merits of his non-fiction and fiction—something I had never encountered in an American journalism classroom or much considered myself. His off-the-cuff comment also was a reminder that any effort to develop mutual understanding between the United States and Bulgaria has to consider that we’re not starting from zero. A basis of understanding between the two cultures already has a history.

Take Hemingway. He was well acquainted with Bulgaria from his early journalism days, and used it in his subsequent fiction. In *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, Hemingway’s dying hero recounts the many things he will never have a chance to write about, including “looking out the window and seeing snow on the mountains of Bulgaria.”

Now the things that Hemingway did write continue to show up in Bulgarian classrooms, and have set or reinforced a theme for restaurants across the country. I turned a preposterous 69 years old at a Hemingway restaurant, complete with Hemingway books, posters, and memorabilia, off the pedestrian mall in Plovdiv. I encountered another Hemingway restaurant in Nessebar on the Black Sea coast, and have heard of still another in Balchik—all

suggesting American cultural influence deeper than the fast food brands of KFC, McDonald’s, and Subway.

And the cultural interplay is not all about food or literature. I have been often surprised—and a bit abashed—by the degree to which Bulgarians hold up the United States as an example of straight-shooting in politics and society.

Pollsters in Bulgaria, for example, have found that the Bulgarian public has little trust in the integrity of the country’s news media, and my students often decried the pressures they were under at their outside media jobs to get into line with the political positions their editors had set. One student plaintively announced that her only ambition after graduation was to find a job in a Bulgarian news organization where she would not be ashamed to work.

Another student offered that partisan political influences, by contrast, would not affect news coverage by American media, implying that the high professional standards of the American media could serve as a working reproof to the politically compromised Bulgarian

media. Well, perhaps, in general, I thought. But not always. Many of the students I encountered tended toward invincible idealism, which made them go hard on their own country and go easy on the United States and Western Europe, whether deserved or not.

The idealists helped set the theme for my semester in Bulgaria, since they led student anti-government demonstrations and the partial and occasional occupation of Sofia University's main administration building. Their demonstrations provided a continuing source for news stories in my class, and, because the timing of many demonstrations conflicted with my class hours, they contributed to student attendance problems and occasionally blocked my number 94 bus home.

What were the demonstrations and occupation like? Hemingway might describe one like this:

There were dozens of people on the stone steps of the Alexander Nevski cathedral. From there, they could watch the crowds surge among lines of helmeted police trying to keep the demonstrators from massing. There were many young people, probably students, but also many older men and women. White, green, and red flags spackled the stretch of hundreds of demonstrators. They were chanting for the government to resign-- "Obstravka!"—to the beat of "Hold that line!" from drums, horns and whistles. A girl in jeans carried a yellow flag with a black clenched fist. Those not chanting were arguing in groups of three or

four. Photographers, videographers, and reporters weaved through the crowds.

Two demonstrators screamed at one another and scuffled and broke apart. The scholar later saw one of the brawling demonstrators with his long blond hair matted with blood and lines of blood crossing his cheek. The scholar recalled other demonstrations he witnessed, in America, with bloodied protesters. That was decades ago.

The scholar went down the stairs and into the crowd and found "Dragomir" on the edge of a group of demonstrators sitting on the cold ground. A policeman was wrestling another protester to his knees. Other police converged, picked the demonstrator up again by both arms and dragged him away to a police wagon. There were boos from the crowd.

"Drago, do they really expect any change? They seem so naïve," the scholar said.

"I love their naivete," Drago said.

A block away, there were still students sleeping on mattresses outside the university auditorium at the top of the stairs they occupied. A white banner across the wall above the auditorium entrance said with green letters in English: "Permanent Revolution."

The scholar thought, this was one of many things he would never have a chance to write about.

Following are three stories produced by Sofia University students who took the international journalism course taught in the fall semester of AY 2013-14 by Fulbright scholar James J. Napoli. The course concentrated on writing news and features in English with students producing about 10 stories in addition to a final news feature such as the ones published here.

Russian Pipeline Project Stirs Concerns for Black Sea Coast

Petia Dimitrova

BA student, Book Publishing

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria

As far as eyes can reach, there's just sand between the last hills covered with forest and the endless sea, the Black Sea. Although the ships are far away, there on the horizon, their rumble is still audible – the only noise that breaks the silence. Local people call this place *Pasha dere*, in other words "the royal bay." This wild beach is just 10 kilometers away from Varna, the biggest city on the Bulgarian coast.

In the summer months many people can be found here. Some spend just a calm afternoon sunbathing, others decide to camp for a week

or two. Now that it is January, it's surprising that a man is walking on the ice cold beach.

Lately, the 47-year old Stefan Velinov is doing this more and more often. He is saying his last goodbyes to his favorite wild beach for next spring construction of a huge gas pipeline begins here.

"In this wilderness I felt free, happy and beloved for a first time," Velinov says. Memories take him back to his younger years when he used to spend whole summers camping in *Pasha dere* with his friends.



Velinov is one of the thousands of Bulgarians against the construction of South Stream – a gas pipeline that will supply Europe with Russian fossil fuel. Since 2008 intergovernmental agreements were signed with Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Greece, Slovenia, Austria, and Croatia to implement the onshore gas pipeline section.

Five years later, at the end of 2013, the exact way the project will be realized in Bulgaria is more opaque than ever.

The competition for a company to take on the biggest construction job in Bulgaria restarted quietly on the last workday before the Christmas holidays. By Jan. 10, the last day of the competition, eleven candidates had applied. The winning company gains the right to supply pipes, machinery, and equipment to start the pipeline and to do staff training.

A group of French and Spanish companies was dissatisfied by the short term for bidding. One of the companies confirmed unofficially for *Capital Daily* its intentions to appeal against the competition.

Another recent problem with South Stream was the statement of European Commission that bilateral agreements signed between Russia and countries like Bulgaria are in violation of the so-called EU Third Energy Package. Speaking at a press conference in Brussels Dec. 12, 2013, European Energy Commissioner Gunther Oettinger said that the European Commission does not oppose the South Stream gas pipeline project and considers it an important addition to the energy network.

After meeting with Oettinger, Economy and Energy Minister Dragomir Stoynev announced that Bulgaria would not withdraw from the project and the scheme would be implemented. Ultimately, Stoynev submitted Dec. 18 a letter to Oettinger authorizing the EC to lead the negotiations with Russia over the South Stream gas pipeline.

In an interview for *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Dec. 31 the Russian Ambassador to Bulgaria Yuri Isakov estimated that Bulgaria would secure revenues of 2.5 milliard euros by 2040 from the project. The South Stream also would create over 600 jobs in Bulgaria, provide

Bulgarian construction companies with unique experience and give a strong boost to the development of the depression-stricken Northwestern Region. Further, the project will increase the workload of Bulgaria's largest Black Sea port, Port Varna, and the Bulgarian State Railways company.

Same statements could be found on the main page of the project. A big banner welcomes the visitors with the sentence: "Eco-friendliness and safety are top priorities of South Stream!"

The sections of the site give more detailed and precise information about the advantages Yuri Isakov discussed. The Environment section maintained that Europe would significantly reduce CO2 emissions before long as transition to natural gas from more polluting fuels is the most effective way of reducing hazardous air emissions. South Stream will be built with the use of cutting-edge and time-tested engineering solutions meeting environmental requirements, according to the site.

Most Bulgarians however, dare skeptical that the promises that environmental laws will be observed. In the beginning of November, 176,000 square meters of land contiguous with the part of the beach, where the pipes of South Stream will be placed, were put up for sale. The offer describes "a unique property with sandy beach on the first line in *Pasha dere*, included in the Master Plan of Varna Municipality." The seller is Eurotop Holding.

The end of November came with the news that a cluster of technical equipment is already positioned on the beach of *Pasha dere*. Local people wrongfully took this as a sign that the construction had begun before the environmental impact report, expected to be ready in February, was officially announced.

An explanation came from Andrey Fick, Technical Director of South Stream Transport, the company implementing the sea part of the project: "I confirm that those are just exploration activities, in a technical way we aren't ready to start."

Fick, speaking for the Bulgarian Capital daily Dec. 2, said pipes will be placed in tunnels below the beach, so there won't be serious harm to the natural look. He said a minimum of trees would be uprooted near the tunnels and more trees would be planted.

The proximity of the pipeline to Varna also has people worried about noise and other pollution. They challenge the assertion that South Stream is more than 20 kilometers away from the city center and about 4.5 kilometers away from south suburbs. In a straight line it is 10 kilometers from center and 2-3 kilometers from the Galata neighborhood.

They also suspect that as a part of the pipeline an entry terminal and a compressor station will be constructed, possibly adding to the noise problem. Statements by builders on the topic are ambiguous - they say noise won't be made in general, but they promise soundproof barriers.

Many Bulgarians oppose South Stream because Russia would be the gas provider. They see this business transaction as a political concession to the Russians, who want to get around Ukraine in gaining access to the Western European market.

Meanwhile, Velinov has finished his walk on the ice cold wild beach. He has already taken the path to the nearest village and he turns his head to the sea for a last time. "This place will soon turn to a cemetery. And people I shared it with... they left Bulgaria long, long ago," he said.

Acquiring Bulgarian Citizenship as Route to Western Europe

Svetlin Ivanov

BA student, Journalism

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, Bulgaria

As Britain trembles at the prospect of a new wave of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens flooding the country's borders, it gets worse: The British press has been hyping a new source of fear by reporting that thousands of non-EU citizens are rushing for Bulgarian citizenship as an easy entrée to Western Europe.

People from the Ukraine, Macedonia, and elsewhere are vying for the privilege of becoming citizens of the poorest country in the EU, Bulgaria, just to get a foothold in Britain and other EU countries that offer more economic opportunity, according to the press.

"I came here because it is easier for me to pick on a career," a Ukrainian woman with some command of Bulgarian and better English said when asked about her new home – Sofia, Bulgaria. Anita Starushko, 18, is studying journalism at Sofia University after graduating high school in her mother country. As a daughter of a family with Bulgarian roots, she is able to apply for Bulgarian citizenship.

"After finishing my bachelor degree here, I am planning to go for master's degree in the United Kingdom," she says.

If recognized by the authorities as a naturalized Bulgarian citizen, Starushko would be able to travel freely, and live and work in any of the 27 EU member states. of the European Union. A Bulgarian passport not only would make travel within the EU easier for her, but would give her a number of other advantages. As a Bulgarian student at British universities, she would not have to pay any tuition fees. She would only need money for books and living costs.

As a Ukrainian citizen in the UK, however, she would have to pay about 6,000 British pounds per year, depending on the university.

Not every foreigner seeking Bulgarian citizenship is planning to leave Bulgaria, even though the Bulgarian passport gives them greater opportunities abroad. Nenad Manov, a 21-year-old Serbian attending Sofia University, is also applying for Bulgarian citizenship.



"Everywhere on the Balkans is worse than here. And I mean not only as a way of living, I really mean everything," he says. He is not planning to go to the West, because, "I believe that if one tries hard enough here, he could be well-off and he could stay here. Abroad, the culture is very different than our Balkan one," Manov says.

Manov says he is studying in Bulgaria because it is cheaper than in Serbia. "A friend of mine pays 450 euros in Belgrade for a semester, whereas here I pay 125 euros for the same."

He estimates that 30 percent of the population in his home town of Dimitrovgrad would like to live in Bulgaria, and 50 to 60 of them come to study at Bulgarian universities each year. He is determined to get his master's degree in Bulgaria.

And it is not just from Serbia that people with similar social and cultural background are coming to Bulgaria, which joined the EU in 2007.

Even greater numbers of people from neighboring Macedonia are doing the same. "The Bulgarian citizenship is very popular in

Macedonia," said Bozhidar Dimitrov, the former minister without portfolio at the Agency for The Bulgarians Abroad. "All we required them (Macedonians) to do is to prove their Bulgarian ancestry. One-third of the Macedonian population might be able to acquire Bulgarian citizenship," Dimitrov says.

According to official reports of the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute, 22,000 Macedonians were given the right to be Bulgarian citizens in 2012. Meanwhile, the notorious British tabloids paint a gloomy picture. "Hundreds of thousands from outside EU could head for UK in passport loophole," the Daily Mail wrote on 31 December 2013. According to the newspaper, Bulgarian passports have been issued to roughly 90,000 Macedonians and 20,000 Serbs.

The Bulgarian Ministry of Justice maintains, however, that for the period 2001–2013 only 51,391 passports were granted to Macedonians and 4,099 to Serbs.

Despite media exaggerations, however, experts say that the abolition of work restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanians will mean that more people will emigrate to raise their own standard of living. And that means that more Macedonians and Ukrainians with Bulgarian ancestors will push for Bulgarian citizenship.

"Bulgarians and Romanians will flock to Britain in far greater numbers than forecast as our economy races ahead of the rest of Europe, a secret report predicts," says the Daily Mail. The British media depict many of these immigrants as uneducated and desperate for the better welfare benefits in Western Europe, despite evidence, including a recent study conducted in Denmark, that immigrants from Eastern Europe bring more economic benefits to the West than they cost.

In any case, non-EU citizens who want to live a life in an economically stable and politically free society are already on the road West, and for some, that road runs through Bulgaria.

Environmentalists Oppose Ski Area Expansion in Pirin Park

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Rosen Nikolov was walking through the felled trees like he was walking through a pile of dead bodies. He looks around like he is searching for some spark of life in the forest, where recently, before the invasion of the lumber jacks, wild animals and protected species inhabited these mountain regions.

Now Nikolov is standing on just one of the many ski tracks that are planned to be built in Pirin National Park to expand the current Bansko ski resort, in spite of the environmental consequences.

"The destruction of Pirin mountain represents the collapse of the Bulgarian State for the last 25 years. If we let the demolition oligarchs destroy the greatest Bulgarian wealth, then our country literally will have nothing," he said.

Nikolov is 25 years old and works as an IT specialist. In his leisure time he does free ride skiing in some of the deepest Bulgarian forests and is one of thousands of protesters against expanding the ski zone in Bansko ski resort.

Many people like him are trying to save what is still left from the forests in Bansko, as the "For the nature coalition" claims, and to

frustrate the ambitions of its concessioner – the Yulen Company – to build a profitable Alpine resort in the park.

Many protesters identify developer Tseko Minev as the destroyer of national heritage of Pirin mountain, because he is also the main stockholder of First Investment Bank, which has invested in many of the hotels and apartments for sale in Bansko. That is why he has a large interest for turning the venerable forests of Pirin into what critics call a combination between Las Vegas and the Alps.

Currently, Bulgaria's forests occupy nearly 30 percent of the country's territory and are its most important national resource. The town of Bansko is situated on the northeast slopes of the Pirin Mountains and most of the range is protected in the Pirin National Park, which is UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Further, within the boundaries of the park, are two nature reserves, where many protected species live. About 2,090 species and subspecies of invertebrates are to be seen in Pirin National Park. Among them are 300 rare species, 214 endemic and 175 relics, as well as 15 that were included on the international endangered species lists. The number of bird species that can be seen in the park

is particularly large — about 160, or 40 percent of all bird species in Bulgaria.

The contract for the concession of the Bansko ski zone within the park was signed in 2001 between the Bulgarian government and Yulen, whose main shareholder is Minev. The concession gives Yulen the right to build and use a ski area on 995 acres of state property for a fee based on a percentage of the sold tickets and ski passes for the facilities.

But the Bulgarian state has no mechanism for monitoring the sales and, in the opinion of eco-protesters, accepts every year a suspiciously small amount of profit from Yulen.

An analysis by the “For the nature coalition” of a Google Earth image of Bansko ski zone shows that during the last 10 years Yulen has doubled the agreed-upon ski area from the contract with the state. Witnesses of the forest destruction reportedly told authorities about the illegal logging, but nothing was done and after a few days 900 acres of spruce forest were dead.

Some environmental analysts say the protected species that inhabited these places will never return.

Nikolov claims that the logging of the spruce forest has caused erosion in the new ski zone, and the town of Bansko and its population are in danger from possible landslides. In addition, Nikolov estimated how much money Yulen had made selling thousands of cubic meters of spruce forest, which belongs to the Bulgarian state, and concluded it didn't report its profits as income to the tax authorities.

The previous government of Bulgaria, dominated by the GERB party, found the concession contract with Yulen had been violated, but didn't impose any fine on the concessioner. On the contrary, former Environment Minister Nona Karadjova proposed changing Bulgarian law to legalize Yulen's violations. In principle, the Pirin National Park is an exclusive state property and every violation of the concession contract gives the state the right to break the contract.

But none of the past five Bulgarian governments has cracked down on Yulen. At last spring's demonstration in Bansko supporting the plan to double the size of the ski zone, the ex-chairman of the National Assembly, Tsetska Tsatcheva, and the current minister of culture, Peter Stoyanovich, expressed support for the expansion.



The cabin lift in Bansko from the hotels to the ski tracks has a capacity of 2,400 people an hour and the bed capacity in the region is 200,000. That's why during the ski season half of Bansko ski resort is empty, because of the bad conditions of the ski tracks and the wasted time of the tourists, who spend hours waiting for the lift.

Ironically, if you want to go skiing or snowboarding in Bansko, you have to pay 30 euros for a one-day ski pass, which is the same price as at the finest ski resorts in the Alps.

Since the town of Bansko didn't turn out to be the good investment as Tseko Minev expected, the shareholders of Yulen and the municipality of Bansko organize every year “spontaneous protests” in Bansko to support further expansion.

“I'm never going to stop fighting against these crimes against nature, because it belongs to me and every single Bulgarian. Our natural heritage is bequeathed to us by our forefathers and it should remain the same for the future generations,” Nikolov said while smashing in his fist a handful of sawdust.

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