

E-NEWSLETTER ISSUE 8 • JUNE 2025

SO A GRIZZLY BEAR WALKS INTO A BLACK HOLE...

Official Newsletter of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission

This sounds like the beginning of a strange joke – or perhaps a student sci-fi film! In fact, this edition of the Fulbright Bulgaria newsletter will give you all the information you need to finish this story for yourself. Bulgarian Scholar Svetoslava Toncheva shares the inside scoop on bears and conservation efforts both in Bulgaria and the US, including the possibility of reintroducing the grizzly to California, while ETA Allyson Hom gives a report on the seventh annual Pravets Film Festival featuring student work from all over Bulgaria. US Scholar Petia Merica-Jones describes her journey from Olympic athlete to NASA astronomer, trading sand courts for star dust – and also explains the concept of “spaghettification,” which is exactly what would happen if a grizzly bear (or a student film maker) walked into a black hole... We hope you enjoy the stories of these fascinating Fulbrighters – and hopefully Ally can lobby for bears and black holes to be added to next year’s “list of elements” that must be included in student films!

Fulbright Bulgaria wishes everyone a bear-y safe and relaxing summer vacation!

** Photo credit: California Grizzly Alliance*



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BULGARIAN GRANTEES

“Bears Follow Me Everywhere”: A Bulgarian Scientist Helps California Bring Back Its Grizzlies

The United States is a country of contrasts, home to both some of the first and largest protected wilderness areas—where grizzlies and black bears still roam freely—and some of the most economically developed regions in the world. It was a passion for nature conservation that brought Svetoslava Toncheva, a Bulgarian Fulbright scholar, to California, where she joined one of the world’s leading environmental studies programs at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In 2025, more than 300 students graduated from the program, eager to begin their work in environmental protection across California, the U.S., and beyond.

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*“Fulbright
opened new
horizons – for
research and
connection.”*

DR. SVETOSLAVA TONCHEVA
FULBRIGHT VISITING
SCHOLAR AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA
BARBARA
AY 2024-25



ETAS TO BULGARIA

Pravets – Home of Partizans, Computers and Fabulous Films

Pravets, known for its historical and tech legacy, has added a new cultural landmark: the Pravets Film Fest, now in its seventh edition. Held on March 21, 2025, the festival featured 23 films from 12 schools, celebrating the creativity of 139 young Bulgarian filmmakers and awarding top honors such as Best Picture and Best Cinematography.

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U.S. GRANTEES

From the Olympics to the Stars: An Interview with Dr. Petia Yanchulova Merica-Jones

Dr. Petia Yanchulova Merica-Jones has lived multiple extraordinary lives. A two-time Olympic beach volleyball player (Sydney 2000, Athens 2004), she later shifted to astrophysics. Now a postdoctoral scholar, she mentors young astronomers and researches the interstellar medium.

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