



Distinguished guests, dear Fulbright alumni and grantees, colleagues and friends,

Good morning. Today is a red letter day for the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, the Fulbright program in Bulgaria and the relations between Bulgaria and the United States. We are here to mark the twentieth birthday of an institution that was established at a turning point in the history of Bulgaria, Europe and the world – the fall of totalitarianism and the rebirth of democracy and freedom. On the scale of history, twenty years do not seem to be such a long span of time. The construction of Notre Dame de Paris took a total of 182 years, the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona was started in 1882 and its completion is anticipated in 2026. On the other hand, twenty years can be a very long time if measured by significant accomplishments: Mozart died at the age of 35 and produced over 600 works. In other words, in human terms time becomes meaningful and tangible only when, only if it is transposed into creative action for the common good. Twenty years are probably not long enough for an institution to make its appearance and establish itself irreversibly in public space. Yet, it's not impossible either, especially if it derives its *raison d'être* from a great idea and an imperishable cause. Such is the Fulbright idea and the Fulbright cause. As you very well know, the idea of mutual understanding through exchange of knowledge and education was fathered by Senator Fulbright in 1946. It emerged like a Phoenix from the ashes of war

and in the beginning and served mainly peace and appeasement in the world. Its mission can be well summed up by the expression originating in the Old Testament “Let’s Beat Swords into Ploughshares” and remarkably sculpted in stone by Evgeni Vuchetich.



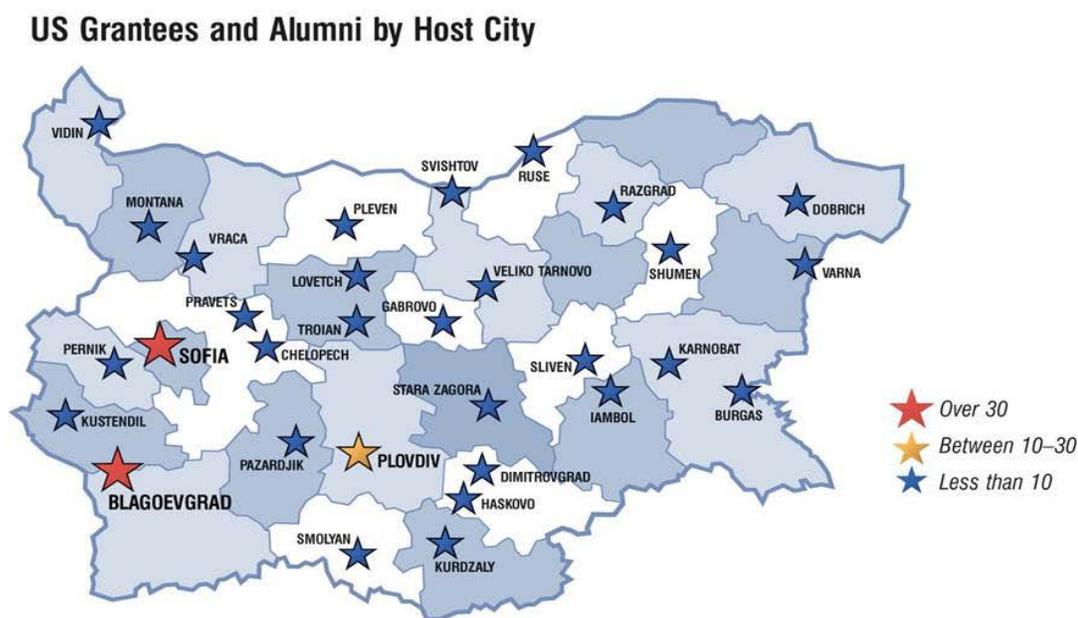
During the long decades of the Cold War the Fulbright exchange continued to perform its important mission, albeit under a very restrictive regime, keeping open the lines of communication between the two ideologically and culturally estranged worlds, carving chinks in the wall that unnaturally divided them. The chinks grew wider and deeper and ultimately brought the wall down.



The last decade of the 20th century ushered in a long and dramatic transition in Eastern and Central Europe, including Bulgaria. Like any momentous idea with endless potential to adjust to the priorities of the historical moment, the Fulbright idea was now harnessed to the thoroughgoing democratic reforms. In the new and incomparably more favorable political and ideological climate, it blossomed freely and bore sweet fruit. It became and is increasingly becoming a powerful tool of liberalization, democratization, internationalization and innovation, especially in education, science, and cultural diplomacy. It is at this decisive moment of history that the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission started on the trajectory of success. In September 1992 a ten-year agreement on the establishment of the BG-US Commission for Educational Exchange was signed between the Governments of BG and US. The Commission became fully operational in February 1993. Looking back, I can see two stages in its development: a

stage of establishment and survival - 1993-2003, and a stage of development: from 2003 down to the present and after. During the first stage, the main objectives of the Commission were to obtain a legal status and start building its administrative structure and public image. Given the political and social situation in Bulgaria then, this turned out to be a difficult and lengthy process fraught with ups and downs, obstacles and pitfalls. All ended well thanks to the commitment of several important Bulgarian and American supporters: the Bulgarian Ministers Marco Todorov, and the late Vice-Minister Lambo Kyuchukov, the US ambassador William Montgomery, PAO Marc Dillen, CAO Walter Theurer, the Board chairman Prof. Yordan Stoichkov and the members of the Fulbright Board. During that time the Commission focused mainly on the administration of the academic exchange. It was paramount to change radically the selection procedures and criteria from the past and introduce the principles of openness, equity, fairness, peer review and excellence. It was only natural that the Fulbright opportunity now widely advertised would attract great public interest. In the first years we had hundreds of applications, although the number of slots was limited, as they still are today. To raise the profile of the Commission, a variety of supplemental activities and units were launched: educational advising in 1994; English language training in 1995; biennial conferences since 1994; the Fulbright alumni association in 1994; quarterly newsletters; local offices in 10 towns in the countryside; FISI in 2002 etc. These activities have continued and have expanded and today are among the most interesting and distinctive characteristics of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission. The second stage, the stage of development, started with the signing of the second bilateral agreement in 2003 which established the Commission in perpetuity. Here I would like to acknowledge the contribution and commitment of the BG Minister of Education Igor Damyanov, the then US Ambassador James Pardue, the CAO Raffi Balian, PAO Michael Seidenstricker, and all the members of the binational Fulbright Board. The second period has been marked by quantitative and qualitative growth of all Fulbright Commission activities. It also reflects a new, positive and productive stage in the political and cultural relations between Bulgaria and the US. In 2003 the BG government started allocating funds for the Fulbright program: initially 40,000; in 2008 the annual allocation was increased to 70,000; in 2009 it was doubled to 140,000 thanks to the support of

the then Minister of Education Daniel Vulchev. The menu of Fulbright grants was enriched, the number of grantees increased, the network of contacts with Bulgarian and American universities broadened, the involvement of the Commission in the Bulgarian educational reform became more visible through outreach, through facilitating inter-university projects; organizing international conferences; supporting the US Studies Association; participating in international events; expanding FISU and the ETA program thanks to ABF etc. Let me give you some statistical evidence: between 1968 (when the Fulbright exchange was first) launched and 1993 (when the commission was established) there were 102 BG and 80 Fulbright alumni. From 1993 to 2013 a total of 899 specialists have been awarded grants. Today the BG-US Fulbright community consists of 1081 members - 533 BG and 548 US. The Fulbright presence is tangibly felt all over Bulgaria and in many places in the US.



Bulgarian Grantees and Alumni by Home City



The Bulgarian alumni come from 35 towns and cities.

There has been significant progress with regard to the other activities of the Commission as well, e.g. advising. For example, between 2006 and 2012, the total number of advisees serviced by the Fulbright advising center and the Fulbright local offices, including outreach visits was 54,445; the Commission offered English language training to 5620 students; the Internet-based testing center serviced 24 458 testees in TOEFL, GRE, GMAT, EPSO, GED etc. The number of users of the Commission's websites and social networks has increased exponentially: e.g. in 2009 they were 14 578; in 2012 they number reached 63266.



Educational Advising, Language Training, Testing

CONTACTS	IN-PERSON	OUTREACH	LANGUAGE TRAINING	TESTING	WEBSITE VISITORS
FY2006	3974	2254	407	4865	
FY2007	4052	3419	522	5643	
FY2008	3405	1967	511	3457	
FY2009	4285	3540	419	3271	14578
FY2010	4234	5089	452	2643	34246
FY2011	4664	2731	334	2522	58938
FY2012	3306	7525	330	2057	63266



By far, the most interesting and original program that the BG Commission has created is FISL. Show slide. It is our unique contribution to the Fulbright program. Over the last 12 years its popularity has grown and it has become a most effective tool of promoting the Fulbright opportunity, international education, intercultural communication, promoting the English language and Bulgaria. In 2010 the Commission received the Innovator Award from the US Department of State.



It is interesting to note, that during the second stage, still going on, the number of candidates for Fulbright grants has relatively decreased (compared to the early years) mainly due to interest in European universities and other destinations, but their quality has significantly improved. Those that come to us are by far the best and the brightest representatives of our academic, scientific and professional communities and they hold the key to the future of Bulgaria. The interest in Bulgaria from among US applicants has also increased.

Fund-raising has been another significant step forward in the growth of the Fulbright Commission. As we all know, it is not easy to raise funds in Bulgaria for at least two reasons: on-going economic difficulties and lack of solid traditions of giving and giving back. Therefore, most of our donors are American: ABF, Thanks to Scandinavia, CEE, University of Oklahoma at Norman. Of the BG donors, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Sofia University, especially Alma Mater Humanities Complex. The total amount of donations is 1,407,000. The America for Bulgaria Foundation is our most

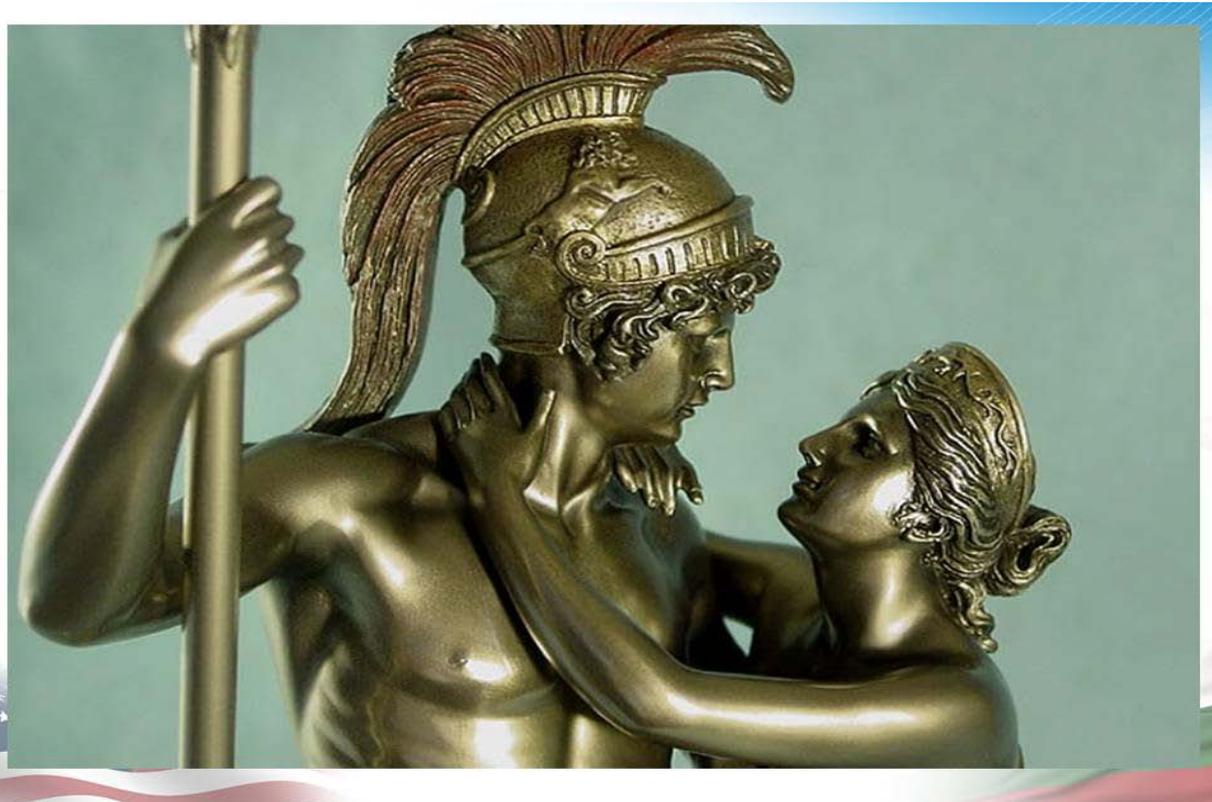
generous donor. Since 2009 we have received a total of 1,185 000 USA. I would like to emphasize their momentous contribution to the expansion and enrichment of FISl and the ETA program.

Dear guests, colleagues and friends, as you can see, over the last 20 years, the Fulbright Board and staff have worked hard and have accomplished quite a lot. The Commission has become a mature, yet still young, authoritative, and respected institution with immaculate reputation. Of course, there is always room to achieve more, and aim higher. Looking forward, I would like to see our activities expand along the following lines: more active involvement in the educational reforms in Bulgaria and the internationalization of BG education through facilitating contacts and linkages between BG and US institutions, and initiating joint projects and joint MA degrees; identifying more fund-raising opportunities to increase the number and quality of BG and US grantees; maintaining the ETA program to upgrade the quality of English language training at school level; helping the Alumni Association restore its activities; helping the newly returned BG grantees find employment; promoting the Fulbright program in the US and expanding the network of contacts with more US universities; strengthening outreach to underserved regions and social groups in Bulgaria etc.

Yet, whatever we did, whatever we have been doing and will continue to do as an institution and a team, the most important thing in the Fulbright exchange remains the unique experience of each individual grantee, the Marco Polo of the 21st century. I firmly believe that the person-to-person contact will never lose its importance and charm and will win the battle with Skype, Facebook, the other social media, and even virtual education. Along with the secretary-generals of NATO and the UN, the 18 heads of state, 10 members of the US congress, the 42 Nobel prize winners, the astronaut Harrison Schmidt, the 62 Pulitzer prize recipients and many other prominent figures from 155 countries, the 533 Bulgarian and 548 American alumni (237 are here) are the contemporary culture heroes who work for the preservation of civilization and the humanization of mankind. In ancient mythology the quest of the culture heroes like Odysseus, Hercules, Theseus, Perseus and many more was a journey that went through three main stages - departure, initiation and return. The initiation stage

involved perilous adventures and fights with the unfamiliar forces of chaos and evil always ending in victory and fulfillment of the mission - whether it was to kill a Cyclops, a Gorgon, a Minotaur or retrieve the Golden Fleece or the Holy Grail. By far the most important stage of the hero's journey was the return to the homeland to share the gains with the community and thus take it to the next step of civilization and humanization. The return to the homeland and sharing the experience with the community is by far the crucial stage of the Fulbright journey. This experience also includes the acquisition of self-knowledge and knowledge of otherness which should broaden the mind and develop tolerance and acceptance of differences. Last but not least, the Fulbright traveler, whether Bulgarian or American, creates, alters and promotes the image of his or her country. In the case of Bulgaria, this is extremely important and urgent.

To further elaborate on the mythological dimensions of the Fulbright idea and cause, I would like to also say that to me it reenacts the myth of Harmonia- the mythical marriage of Ares, the god of war and Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty.



Thus Harmonia is a universal symbol of love, peace and mutual understanding and that's exactly the ultimate goal of the Fulbright program and the essence of intercultural education that it promotes.

Here, I would like to quote Senator Fulbright:



The essence of intercultural education is the acquisition of empathy – the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see or may see it more accurately. The simple purpose of the exchange programs ... is to erode the culturally rooted mistrust that sets nations against one another. The exchange program is not a panacea but an avenue of hope.



In conclusion, I would like to most cordially thank all of you, the members of the BG-US Fulbright community, who are present and those who are not, for what you are and what you will achieve in your personal and professional lives and careers; the BG and US Government (represented by the US Embassy, and Ministry of Education ; the members of the binational Fulbright Board throughout those 20 years as well as the

current members: Elizabeth Fitzsimmons, Richard Damstra, Geoffrey Dean, Angela Rodel, Tom Higgins, Lena Roussenova, Neda Kristanova, Maria Metodieva. the members of the Fulbright staff Anastassia Miteva, Maria Kostova, Rada Kaneva, Snezhana Teneva, Iolanta Koprinova, Taniya Petrova, Iliana Dimitrova, Ivan Penchev, Dora Barova, Iliana Toshkova, Adrian Zlatanov, as well as those who, unfortunately left us prematurely – Katya Radoslavova, Ani Andonova, Lyudmila Baeva, for their selfless and talented work; our partners and colleagues from ECA (especially Scott Righetti), IIE, CIES, Department of Education, university rectors and leaders of BG educational institutions as well as professors, alumni and grantees, principals and teachers from BG schools especially those who host ETAs, all our generous donors and sponsors, especially ABF, all supporters and friends of Fulbright.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY and have an enjoyable and memorable day!

Julia Stefanova