

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2008-2009



David Siefkin, PAO, Embassy of the United States in Bulgaria, talking to the new group of Bulgarian Fulbright grantees at the one-day orientation.

On June 18, 2008 the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission held a one-day orientation for the Bulgarian Fulbright grantees preparing to go to the U.S. as graduate students, scholars and teachers.

Recipients of grants for AY 2008-09 are 6 senior scholars, 7 graduate students, 2 teachers, 2 Hubert Humphrey fellows. A representative of an ecological non-governmental organization was awarded

the joint Fulbright-CEE Trust Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society. We are particularly proud that a Bulgarian student was selected as a recipient of the highly prestigious Science and Technology PhD Award.

We wish all grantees a very successful and rewarding experience in the U.S.

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in Academic Year 2008-09

Senior Scholars

Dr. BOYAN ALEXIEV

Field of specialization: Linguistics

Host institution in the U.S.: Long Island University, NY

Duration of grant: 5 months, starting January 5, 2009

Dr. TOLYA STOITSOVA

Field of specialization: Mass Communications

Host institution in the U.S.: University of California, CA

Duration of grant: 5 months, starting August 15, 2008

Dr. STOYAN NEDELICHEV

Field of specialization: Chemical Engineering

Host institution in the U.S.: University of Pittsburgh, PA

Duration of grant: 5 months, starting March 1, 2009

In This Issue:

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2008-2009	01
Eighth Fulbright International Conference	03
Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar	07
Fulbright Office News	21
To Chicago and Back	22
Out of America	24



Senior Scholars

Dr. MARGARET DIMITROVA

Field of specialization: Slavic Studies
Host institution in the U.S.: Ohio State University, OH
Duration of grant: 5 months, starting February 12, 2009

Dr. TEMENUZHKA SEIZOVA

Field of specialization: Linguistics
Host institution in the U.S.: Ohio State University, OH
Duration of grant: 5 months, starting September 8, 2008

Dr. NIKOLAY BONEV

Field of specialization: Geotectonics
Host institution in the U.S.: Miami University, OH
Duration of grant: 5 months, starting August 15, 2008

Graduate Students

POLINA SLAVCHEVA

Field of study: Creative Writing
Degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Houston, TX

GEORGI ILIEV

Field of study: Business Administration
Degree: MBA
Host institution in the U.S.: Goizueta Business School, Emory University, GA

GALINA NIKOLOVA

Field of study: Organization Dynamics
Degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: The New School for Management and Urban Policy, NY

CHAVDAR CHAVDAROV

Field of study: Business Administration
Degree: MBA
Host institution in the U.S.: Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, MI

ANI GESHEVA

Field of study: Finances
Degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: New York University, NY

MYUZHDE MYUMYUN

Field of study: East Asian Studies
Degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: Columbia University, NY

GERGANA ANTOVA

Field of study: Sound Engineering
Degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: Purdue University Indianapolis, IN

Science and Technology Ph.D. Awards

MILENA LESSEVA

Field of study: Molecular Biology
Degree: Ph.D.
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Florida, FL

Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowships

SVETLOZAR KIRILOV

Field of specialization: Journalism
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Maryland, MD
Duration of grant: 10 months, starting August 9, 2008

LEDA SHIYAKOVA

Field of specialization: Public Policy
Host institution in the U.S.: Washington University, WA
Duration of grant: 10 months, starting September 4, 2008

Teachers

MARIELA STOILOVA

"Bertolt Brecht" Language School, Pazardzhik
Host institution in the U.S.: Century High School, Pocatello, ID
Duration of grant: 12 months, starting August 4, 2008

VELINA DRAGANOVA

81st "Victor Hugo" High School, Sofia
Host institution in the U.S.: C.D. Hylton Senior High School, Woodbridge, VA
Duration of grant: 12 months, starting August 4, 2008

Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society

IVAN KOZHUHAROV

Field of specialization: Ecology
Host institution in the U.S.: Cope Environmental Center, Centerville, IN
Duration of grant: 4 months, starting April, 2009

Education and Society: Problems, Prospects, Prognoses

8th Fulbright International Conference
 Dedicated to the 15th anniversary of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission
 and the 120th Anniversary of Sofia University
 Sofia, April 11 – 12, 2008

The 8th Fulbright International Conference on “Education and Society: Problems, Prospects, Prognoses” took place on April 11 – 12 at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The Conference was dedicated to the 15th Anniversary from the establishment of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission and the 120th Anniversary of Sofia University. There were 106 participants from Bulgaria and the U.S. Most of them were Fulbright alumni and grantees.

OPENING ADDRESS

Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director

Madam Deputy Minister,
 Vice-Rector Popivanov,
 Ambassador Byerle,
 Ambassador Keating,
 Dear Members of the Fulbright Commission,
 Dear participants, colleagues and friends,

Thank you for honoring our invitation to attend the 8th international conference on “Education and Society: Problems, Prospects, Prognoses. It is dedicated to the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange. Every biennial conference we have held since 1994 has been an occasion to inspect and straighten the Fulbright ranks. Although not all the members of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright community are present today, we do have a critical mass of participants that guarantees success. I also know that the overwhelming majority of Bulgarian Fulbright grantees have completed their projects *cum laude* and are back home. If their return rate was representative for Bulgaria, there would be no entry visas between our country and the US.

In a speech Cicero addresses two orators with the question, “*Quibus rebus gestis, quo hostem superato, conventionem advocare ausus es?*” I am not going to bore you with a detailed report on the activities of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission during the last fifteen years. To justify the convention of this assembly however, I would like to very briefly outline their results by using mostly figures and statistics.

As you may well know, the Fulbright program is being admin-



Opening Session: Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director

istered in 150 countries, and fifty of them have binational Commissions. For FY 2007 the annual budget appropriation Congress made to the Department of State was \$ 195 M. In addition, over \$ 120 M came from national governments and the private sector. Since 1993 the US government has invested about \$ 14 M into the Fulbright program in Bulgaria. This is at once a small and a very large amount of money – it very much depends on the context in which it is assessed. For example, \$14 M represent one tenth of the price of the most expensive painting in the world whose author is the American abstractionist Jackson Pollack. On February 19 this year a 25-year-old businessman from Abu Dhabi paid \$14 M to have new license plates for his many cars. He wanted the number 1 on all of them because he believed that this is the best number; he himself wanted to be number one and have the best of everything in the world.

The 14M dollars from the US government and the \$ 230,000 the Bulgarian government has given to the Fulbright program have also created a world-class product – the Bulgarian-American Fulbright community. Today it has 882 members – 458 Bulgarian and 424 US graduate students, distinguished scholars and scientists from top universities and research centers in the US and Bulgaria; experts,

high school teachers and administrators, participants in US studies summer institutes. Their intellect, their talent and professional experience have helped Bulgarian and American education and science by enhancing their quality and opening them to the world. Furthermore, they have improved the image of Bulgaria and the United States, and have expanded the cultural contacts between the two nations. Last but by far not least, the Bulgarian and the American Fulbright alumni have stimulated their own growth as individuals, experts and members of the civil society. For us the ideal Fulbright grantee and alum is highly educated, competitive, creative and innovative, critical yet tolerant, open to other cultures and traditions, a person with leadership and management potential, qualities and skills, exigent and self-exigent but above all free.

The investment of \$ 14,230 M has enabled the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission to unfold various supplementary activities that have helped it develop as an authoritative, respectable and useful institution actively involved in the educational reform underway in Bulgaria over the last couple of decades. In 1995 we opened an English language training center that has hitherto serviced 7, 615 students. In 1996 two test centers began to operate in Sofia and Plovdiv: one for American standardized tests (TOEFL, GRE, and GMAT) and another for SAT administration. The number of testees, including the CFA AND EPSO exams is 40,592. From the very beginning the Commission established an advising center offering free information and guidance about US education at all levels. So far the center has serviced 216,450 Bulgarian citizens. In 2002 the Commission gave birth to the annual Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) that has since offered interdisciplinary courses and cultural program to students, university professors and Fulbright grantees from all over the world. The statistics here is also quite impressive: the number of FISI alumni is 289. They come from 27 countries, including Bulgaria and the US. The US participants are students and faculty from 66 US universities and colleges.

During the last 15 years the Commission has opened local information centers in the cities of Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Burgas, Varna, Shumen, Rousse, Vidin, Smolyan, Kurdjali, Madan.

To cut a long story short, Fulbright has made it in Bulgaria as

well. The key to the success of this remarkable program is the power, the depth, the humaneness and nobleness of the Fulbright idea of attaining mutual understanding, harmony and peace among different communities, nations and cultures through exchange of education, knowledge and values.

Doubtless, the idea can be materialized only through the honest efforts of people, and institutions that believe in it. At this point, I would like to express our deep gratitude to all Bulgarian and American Fulbright alumni and grantees, the Bulgarian and US governments represented by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the Department of State and the US Embassy, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Institute of International Education, the Council of International Exchange of scholars, partner US and Bulgarian universities and high schools; the honorary chairpersons of the Fulbright Commission Board, the ministers of education and science and the US ambassadors to Bulgaria since 1993, the current honorary chairmen Minister Daniel Vulchev and Ambassador John Byerle, the members of the Fulbright Board and staff, including the test administrators, the English language instructors and the local coordinators from 1993 down to the present day. I would like to thank all volunteers and supporters of the Fulbright program from all over Bulgaria and the US.

Let me assure you that the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange will continue to work for international education by providing prestigious scholarships, reliable information and useful guidance; by facilitating cooperation between Bulgarian and US educational institutions; by getting involved in binational and transatlantic educational projects; by helping establish international undergraduate and graduate programs. In other words, the Commission will continue to invest funds and efforts to raise the quality of education and intercultural communication through internationalization relying a lot on the support of the Bulgarian and US governments, non-government institutions, including the private sector and business.

I declare the 8th Fulbright conference open and wish all participants productive work and great success. Thank you.

Remarks by Ambassador Beyrle for the Opening of the Fulbright 15th Anniversary Conference

Deputy Rector Prof. Popivanov, Deputy Minister Vitkova, Your Excellency dear Geoffrey, Mrs. Stefanova, dear guests.

I am honored to be at this great University today and in this impressive historical aula to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Fulbright Program. Yet, for more than fifteen years, Fulbright has been the bridge between American and Bulgarian Universities. As you know, even during the dark days of the Cold War, when our political relations were almost inexistent, and Europe was divided, our universities and scholars continued to exchange ideas through the Fulbright Program. My wife Joselyn had the task of running the program at the Embassy at that time and later she became the coor-



Conference participants



Greeting Address. From left to right: John Beyrle, Ambassador of the U.S. to the Republic of Bulgaria; Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director; Ekaterina Vitkova, Deputy Minister of Education and Science; Prof. Nedyu Popivanov, Vice-Rector of Sofia University and Geoffrey Keating, Ambassador of Ireland to the Republic of Bulgaria

director of the Fulbright Program for Europe at USIA in Washington, D.C. and I can testify to the enthusiasm and dedication of the participants then; and, thanks to my frequent contacts with Fulbright Scholars in the last two and half years; I can testify to their dedication and enthusiasm today.

Fifteen years ago, only a handful of scholars were able to travel back and forth between the United States and Bulgaria. Today, Fulbright is only one part of the larger picture. Today there are between three and four thousand Bulgarians studying in the United States. Thanks to the Summer Work/Travel Program, another ten thousand or more Bulgarian students will visit the United States, which will be an educational experience for all of them.

When I traveled across the United States last May with Ambassador Poptodorova, I had the opportunity to meet a number of the Bulgarian students in the United States, studying at the very best universities. American Universities want Bulgarian students, they are looking for them, because they come with an excellent education, combined with a dedication and drive which sets them apart.

This spring we are organizing an exhibit at the Sofia Public Library on Bulgarian-Americans who have contributed to American business, science, and the arts. I was struck by the remarkable accomplishments of these young people, who were educated in Bulgaria and now live in the United States. Let me give you some examples:

Georgi Mandushev, born in 1962 in Varna. Today he is member of team of astronomers at Lowell Observatory in Arizona. In 2007, he and his team discovered the largest-known planet in the Universe.

David Sasselov, born in 1961 in Nessebur; another astronomer; his is now director of the Origins of Life Initiative at Harvard University, searching for the secrets of the origins of life in the Universe. It's a remarkable that a Bulgarian is the director of the Origins of Life Initiative at Harvard!

Dr. Simeon Boyadjiev, a specialist in genetic epidemiology at the University of California at Davis Medical Center, working to identify the genes which are responsible for birth defects in children.

Georgi Borshukov, born in 1973. He won an Academy Award for Scientific and Technical Achievement for his work on the special effects of the movie Matrix.

These are just a few of the young Bulgarians who are making a difference in American science and technology. This illustrates both the strength of the Bulgarian system, which prepared these young people for the careers; and the chief challenge - the fact that many talented Bulgarian emigrate to the United States, or to Europe, where they believe there are more opportunities for them to advance when they have finished their educations.

What can Bulgaria and the United States do together about this?

- First, we are trying together to bring more American companies and more investment to Bulgaria, which will create good jobs, at good salaries, so more talented young Bulgarians will remain here in Bulgaria, and not feel they have to go to America or Europe.

- Second, we hope to establish, through Fulbright and other programs, more opportunities for exchanges, where more students can have opportunities to study abroad, then return home. I particularly would like to see more American students coming to Bulgaria – the number now is very small, largely because the Americans speak no foreign languages; far too few Americans study foreign languages. If Bulgarian universities offer more courses in English,



Conference participants

they are more likely to attract more American and European students. I would like to see more Americans teaching at Bulgarian universities, and more Bulgarians teaching at American universities. How can we make this happen? Through the Fulbright program of course! I hope that the Bulgarian Government can increase its funding for Fulbright, to provide more opportunities for both Americans and Bulgarians to exchange their knowledge.

I have been having a few fruitful conversations with Minister Vulchev on that subject and I am hopeful that the Bulgarian govern-



Roundtable discussion "The quality of university education in Bulgaria". From left to right: Elena Galinova, Ludmila Kostova, Detelin Elenkov, Anna-Maria Totomanova, Ana Proykova, Chavdar Stoyanov, Plamen Pantev, Tsvetan Simeonov, Alexander Kyosev, Dimitar Andreichin

end of our exploring will be to return to the place we began, and to know it for the first time." Once Bulgarian students have had the opportunity to go to the Universities of Europe and America, they will come back home to Bulgaria, to rediscover their own country, and to fulfill its potential. And American students will come to Bulgaria and return to the United States with a knowledge of the richness of Bulgarian life and culture; which will add a new dimension to their own lives. That is the goal that I hope we can achieve together, through the Fulbright Program. Thank you.



Ivaylo Ivanov, student at the University of National and World Economy in Sofia, presenting at the Roundtable discussion "Academic mobility and international cooperation"

ment will find ways to secure that increase.

Our ultimate goal, I believe, should be a world of knowledge without frontiers – where students and professors can travel freely to study and teach in each other's countries. The Fulbright experience shows that exchange programs can change people's lives; but, even more important, exchange programs can change the world.

As T. S. Eliot said, "We shall not cease from exploring - and the

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-Hays Summer Seminar in Bulgaria June 19 – July 7, 2008

Bulgaria and Greece: A Shared Past and a Common Future



Official opening: Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, addressing the participants



Opening reception at Crystal Palace Restaurant

On June 19 – July 7, 2008 the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission conducted its fifth Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar entitled “Bulgaria and Greece: A Shared Past and a Common Future”. It was sponsored and administered by the U.S. Department of Education. The participants were 16 U.S. university and college professors and high school teachers from 10 U.S. states. The rich program involved three intensive weeks of lectures, discussions, workshops, meetings, cultural events and a tour of Bulgaria.



A class in Bulgarian folk dancing



Fulbright student Elizabeth Setzer's Performance at the Opening reception



Discussion on Bulgaria in the EU



At a concert, National Art Gallery



A visit to the National Museum of History



Fulbright session at the Commission's office



Fulbright session at the Commission's office



A visit to the First English Language School in Sofia



A meeting with faculty from the English Department of Veliko Turnovo University



Trip to Etura Ethnographic Complex



Varna, in front of the Cathedral



Trip to Aladja Monastery



A wrap-up session at the Fulbright Commission's office



A farewell dinner at Pri Orlite Restaurant

Fulbright-Hays Bulgaria 2008: A Life Changing Visit

Amy Andersen, Ed. D.

Assistant Professor of Reading, Language Arts, and Early Childhood
West Texas A&M University

“So, what your favorite thing about your trip?” I think I have heard this question about 100 times since my return from my 2008 Fulbright-Hays seminar abroad. I traveled extensively in both Greece and Bulgaria during my incredible trip. In Bulgaria, we heard from visiting lecturers, visited museums, and visited churches and other sites of historical and cultural interest. We traveled across the country all the way out to the Black Sea coast. We spent several days in the capital of Sofia and really got to know the area in ways a regular tourist never could. We visited schools and universities and met with teachers talking about ways to engage students in interactive projects. We met former Fulbrighters and visited with them about their projects and ours. We had time on our own to investigate the city of Sofia. We took in a play by Shakespeare at the Ivan Vizov theater (performed in Russian). We attended a special concert in the National Museum of Art that showcased the talents of many different musicians in Sofia. We climbed Vitosha mountain and climbed up to the castle at Veliko Turnovo. We enjoyed a Bulgarian barbeque and witnessed the fire dance. We visited Rila monastery with its incredible serenity and icon paintings (and fried bread at the bakery). How could I possibly choose the “favorite” thing about this trip?

I have been wrestling with this question since my return and have been unable to pick a particular place or incident as my favorite. I can tell you about three events in Bulgaria that have changed me. The first was the National Museum of History. Yes, a museum. I know that does not sound very exciting, but there were several things about this museum that were very exciting to me. This museum was located in the former Communist Palace and was incredible. There were so many historical exhibits that we almost could not take them all in. Being a professor of education and specifically reading, I particularly enjoyed the displays about the creation of the Cyrillic alphabet and the classroom exhibit and spent time thinking about ways to incorporate these things into my reading courses back



home. But that was not what changed me. We were getting tired and nearing the end of a long day that started with lectures and ended with a tour of the museum before a formal reception back at the hotel. We had been walking up and down stairs and all over the museum for a few hours and were nearing the end of the tour. We went into a room that had more modern exhibits and artifacts including several from the period of World War II. I stood in front of one display and listened to

our guide, Danny, explaining how the Jews of Bulgaria were saved during the war. Several forces within the country refused to allow deportation to Auschwitz where they would undoubtedly be marched straight to their deaths. These 50,000 Bulgarian Jews were saved through delaying tactics on the part of some government officials until the tide of war turned against the Nazis. I had not known about this before. I had to walk away from the group for several minutes as I teared up and did not want the others to see. In March of 2008, I accompanied 20 freshmen from our college to Poland to visit Auschwitz after reading *Night* and meeting Professor Elie Wiesel. This trip has had a huge impact on me and my students and now here I am in Bulgaria hearing and reading about how 50,000 Jews were saved!! Why have I never heard about this before? This is something I will be sharing with my students in class.

The second profound experience I had in Bulgaria was our visit to Boyana Church. We were scheduled to go on an afternoon but arrived too late in the day to visit inside the church. We returned the following morning and I was in the first group to go inside. I don't know what I was expecting but I was floored by the beauty of the paintings inside the church. Our guide was incredible at explaining the paintings and how old they were. I teared up again. I am not even sure why. I am not an extremely religious person but those paintings affected me greatly on a very emotional level. I still cannot explain what it is about this church that had such an effect. Perhaps it was the idea that these paintings were hidden inside a very plain building to ensure the privacy of those worshipping there. Perhaps it was the age of the paintings and the idea that they have been so well taken care of over the years. Perhaps it was the passion of our guide as he touched each of us to point out pertinent details in the paintings. Whatever it was, this event has also changed me.

The final thing about my visit to Bulgaria that has changed me



is simple. It is the Bulgarian people themselves. The people in the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission could not have been more organized or prepared for us. But, they were also personable and were there to take care of us. And take care of us they did. They also introduced us to past Fulbrighters who were eager to discuss and share ideas about their country. What a great asset to our visit. We felt as though we knew people in Sofia by the time we departed. Several of us were invited to visit with Boyan Dobrev at his art studio. The group who went viewed his artwork and discussed his latest projects. Then we ordered pizza (which Boyan insisted on paying for). It was a wonderful afternoon. This was only one of the informative encounters we had with former Fulbrighters and the Bulgarian people

in general. I found them to be proud of their city and country, easy to talk to and interested in what we had to say. Everywhere we went in Bulgaria we found it easy to talk with people. I cannot think of a better way to commend the Bulgarian Fulbright commission or the country of Bulgaria than the friendliness of its people.

Although I cannot narrow down my "favorite" experience in Bulgaria, it all boils down the welcoming nature of the people we encountered as we made our way across this beautiful country. I am forever grateful to the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission for introducing me to your wonderful country and its people. Keep up the good work and keep changing lives.

Global Exchanges

Hope K. Staab
 Director, Wo International Center
 Punahou School, Hawaii

The 2008 Fulbright to Greece and Bulgaria led me to a whole new interest and understanding of an unfamiliar part of the world, and an appreciation for the important role global exchanges have played in the history of this area. Living in Hawaii where Asian and Pacific cultures pervade and enrich these multicultural islands, issues of the Balkans are indeed foreign. Now I find myself delving into history books to understand the news that comes out of the area.

Also, coming from a Chinese background, history and borders were well established and well defined. It was therefore fascinating studying countries whose borders have shifted and in dispute even in modern times, and whose sense of "national identity" are still being defined.

By studying the two countries' history and touring historical sights, this Greece and Bulgarian Fulbright highlight the fact global exchanges, or "globalization" have existed throughout history. Recent intense media focus on globalization convey the assumption global interaction and global problems are phenomena of the 20th century, yet just the architecture in Sophia demonstrate there has been a long history of global exchanges. Two important dynamics of globalization are trade and migration, both of these played essential roles historically in the Balkans.

Because of these two countries' geographical location, migration and trade, as early as third millennia B.C.E. led to interaction with different societies. Both countries trace its ancient ancestors to migratory Indo-Europeans from central Asia and northern Balkans, as people migrated in search of food, shelter and land.

The Mediterranean also served as a highway for trade; therefore, early Greek culture reflected influences of Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and Phoenicians. These expanding patterns of trade brought different parts of the world into contact with each other, and empires of early civilization established political and economic order so goods could be exchanged efficiently over large geographic territories. From around 400 BC, conquests by Macedonians, Romans, and Asiatic tribes from central Asia formed mixed groups (called bulgaris) and established trade routes between Greece and areas around Black Sea, which later served as a vehicle for foreign influences such as philosophy, art, and religion.

Bulgaria's national identity started forming with the founding of Bulgarian empire in 681, as the country expanded north to present day Romania & Ukraine and west to parts of today's Macedonia, Albania and south to Adriatic, Aegean Seas.

With the schism between "Eastern Orthodox" Christian (Greek) east and "Roman Catholic" (Latin) of Rome, Bulgaria came under Byzantine rule. Bulgarian ruling families studied Greek language and literature in Constantinople, and followed Byzantine examples in organizing court & capital.

As the Ottoman Empire spread, Bulgaria, like other Balkan countries, was part of the ottoman rule for five hundred years. Non-Muslims paid higher tax; churches had to be lower than mosques. Therefore under Ottoman rule, all aspects of Bulgarian culture - church, language, literature - diminished. Its religion and culture survived only because people lived in small isolated and ethnically homogenous villages. Communities surrounding monasteries and

traveling monks especially, kept the Bulgarian cultural, and psychological fabric intact.

The book of one of these monks, which looked back on Bulgarian glories, along with many of its young people educated abroad, spread an “awakening” and cultural revival in the mid 1800’s in education, literacy, literature and the creation of an intelligentsia that maintained strong links with peasantry.

The stirring of this nationalism demanded political separation and independence from the Ottomans. The Turkish slaughter of thousands of Bulgarian Christians during these struggles brought awareness of this region and involvement of the western powers. The Russian victory in the Russo-Turkish War gave Bulgaria at first, territory to the three seas. But alarmed western powers (Britain & Austria-Hungary), fearing Russian influence in the Balkans, demanded the borders redrawn.

The western European powers’ struggles and wars against each other continued to involve Bulgaria through the two World Wars up through the formation of a bipolar world after WWII. Bulgaria was part of the Eastern Block until 1989.

Since then, trade and migration once again play an important part in present day Bulgaria. As we travelled through the country, we saw remnants of the Communist era and the country’s attempt to invigorate its economy through investment, tourism and trade. Entrance to the EU in 2007 has opened the country once again to

expanding patterns of trade and ideological exchanges. Many Bulgarians are also taking advantage of this opening to move to more prosperous parts of the EU in search of job and educational opportunities.

It was fascinating to spend eighteen days in Bulgaria and witness outcomes of global exchanges throughout history and today. I have to thank the Fulbright office for my learning. The ladies at the Fulbright office embody the ideals of “global exchanges” and the richness of Bulgaria – its people. Their hospitality and stories opened a new world to me.



Hope K. Staab (second from left to right)

Warm people, diverse places, and a rich history *Some shared thoughts of my 17 days in Bulgaria*

Ann T. Ackerman, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Education
Rivier College, New Hampshire



In some way, my Bulgarian experience began many years ago when I was asked to fill-in for another professor and teach an Eastern European History course that focused on the satellite states. I am a Modern European Historian but my concentration was more concentrated on other countries. In my quick preparation for and dur-

ing this teaching assignment at that Massachusetts college, I learned a lot but since then my attention to these countries was more current events and the European Union.

When the opportunity to apply for the Fulbright – Hays seminar in Greece and Bulgaria was available, I did. When the acceptance packet came, I was surprised and truly astounded. It is one of the greatest honors that I have ever received.

And the preparing began with the great materials both the CEERES in Chicago and Fulbright Bulgaria sent us. There was a lot to absorb. Then during the three –day orientation in Chicago, we met with expert scholars to learn more. And the excitement was building.

Bulgaria was full of lovely surprises for me and my colleagues. I found Bulgaria to be warm and friendly as well as a nation of contrasts.

The first week the Fulbrighters met with leading educators and scholars for a series of lectures about Bulgaria and Bulgarian History which opened with Dr. Maya Vassileva's "Ancient Civilization in Southeast Europe". It linked the histories of both Greece and Bulgaria and was followed by a visit to the National Museum of History to see its collection of artifacts from antiquities to more recent. The lecture and museum were a bridge between the two parts of the seminar. Additionally, that one particular exhibit at the museum was especially touching since I am Jewish both religiously and culturally.

I loved Dr. Rayna Gavrilo's lecture giving us an overview of "Bulgarian History and Culture". It certainly helped as we visited and experienced many "Bulgarian" lifestyles, and sights. Equally good were Drs. Kostadin Grozev and Tamara Todorova lectures on "Bulgaria Today: Political and Economic Issues". I really wish we had had a longer time with them. In their presentations, I learned more about the decisions that Bulgaria had to make or were forced on them in the 20th-21st Centuries. I was also reminded how much globalization exists and that there is a great web of international connectiveness (some say it is a flattening of the world).

I thought of much of what I had learned in my Goethe Institut TOPS experience when I heard Dr. Dinko Kinkov and Dr. Yordan Baev when they shared their knowledge in the lectures "Bulgaria in the EU and the Transatlantic Community" and "Balkan Questions(s)".

I was fascinated with Dr. Ilona Tomova's "Social Issues: Integration and Inclusion of Socially Disadvantage Groups". The groups may be different but there are some similarities to the challenges we face in the United States (US). And, similar to the US, sorting out facts from perceptions is important. Her lecture linked with much of what was discussed in several of the previous lectures.

In one workshop, we learned the steps to several Bulgarian folk dances and the meanings for many of the steps and music with Daniela Ivanova. It was great fun; then that evening, we attended a dinner party where there was an opportunity to practice what we learned. Two of our group were singled out to perform and we enjoyed the excellent performances.

Another enjoyable evening there was a reception with prominent Bulgarian citizens and scholars as well as teachers from various European countries who were in Sofia for an orientation before embarking on a year's teacher exchange in the US. It was another opportunity to learn about education and customs in other parts of Europe as well as answer questions about the US and our education systems.

Probably one of the most memorable evenings was a private concert for us sponsored by the Bulgarian Minister of Culture at the National Art Gallery. The program included a vocal acapello ensemble, Yulangelo, who sang. I bought one of their CDs to enjoy at home. The Demista Quartet included four women dressed in traditional clothing from different regions performing folk songs from those varied regions. Additionally there was Violinist Joseph Radionor and pianist Zorniza Radionova and soloist Viktoria Vassilenko providing marvelous music. The building was the former royal palace. What an evening – great entertainment in a beautiful setting. We were adding to our many experiences of Bulgarian culture.

Equally moving was the lecture and literary reading afternoon. Literary critic Angel Igov provided insight into contemporary literary



scene and said that Bulgaria was still trying to find its literary place in society. He spoke of numerous authors. One of Bulgaria's more prolific writers (short stories, poet and novelist) Alek Popov read part of his "Nineveh" for us. Another poet and short story writer Kristin Dimitrova also shared one of her selection. They answered questions for our group and charmed us all.

The group also visited colleges, historic sites, and every

day places.

The Rila Monastery frescoes fascinated me. The blues in some of paintings reminded me of the Renaissance and yet they were from a much different period and they were distinctly Bulgarian.

The castle at Veliko Turnovo was something to behold particularly at night when there was a laser light show. We sat in the town square with some of the faculty from the Veliko Turnovo faculty and hundreds of other people and watched this spectacular 20 minute show.

One of my impressions of Bulgaria was that the Bulgarian people use their parks day and night for community and family gatherings. The latter seemed to be multi-generational.

I was also impressed with the craftsmanship of many of the people.

The Black Sea resort areas were inviting and are what the advertisements promote.

There are so many physical sights that were engaging but not enough room to share my impressions of them.

I celebrated my birthday while in Bulgaria. Julia and Iolanta were so cute as they wished me happy birthday as the group was preparing to board the bus for they. I received a beautiful rose bouquet and a charming Bulgaria gift. One birthday that I won't forget.

As an educator and teacher-trainer, I enjoyed meeting so many teachers from various schools and I look forward to my continued email exchanges with some of them. The school and university visits were good and varied. Since it was summer break at most of these educational institutions, it was generous of so many faculties to come in and meet with us.

All through the visit there was always 1-2 of Fulbright Bulgaria staff with us and who very generously answered our questions and often shared their family's history.

All-in-all the long Thracian heritage, modern Bulgarian history, its continued challenge to finish throwing off the legacy of the Soviet yoke and its current work to meet the EU requirements, I see Bulgaria as a rich country in heritage and strength as well as in great transition.

It is a country that I would like to visit again and am deeply indebted to the Fulbright – Hays Foundation for giving me this tremendous experience.

An African-American Teacher's View on 21st Century Bulgaria

Daniel V. Tillman
Teacher
Stuyvesant High School, New York



As an African American and an educator, I was deeply moved by the experience that the Fulbright Bulgaria Commission provided my colleagues and me in June and July of this year. To facilitate our understanding of the broad shifts taking place in their society as it embraces accession to the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization while maintaining an appreciation of their nation's nearly 1400 year old past, the Fulbright Bulgaria Commission provided lectures and question-answer sessions with scholars. Just a few of them were Associate Professor Dr. Dinko Dinkov, Bulgarian European Community Studies Association President, Jean Monnet lecturer at the University of National and World Economy in Sofia; Associate Professor Dr. Kostadin Grozev at the Chair of Modern and Contemporary World History, Faculty of History, Sofia University who is the author of one of Bulgaria's current 10th grade high-school textbooks on World and Civilization in the 20th Century and is the founder of the Europartners 2000 Foundation and has been a member of the Managing Board of the Bulgarian American Studies Association since 2002; and novelist, playwright and short story writer

Alexander Vassilev Popov who is Editor-in-Chief of Rodna Rech literary magazine and press secretary of the Bulgarian P.E.N. Centre.

Throughout all of these discussions, it was clear that the challenge of building a Bulgarian civil society (one in which individuals inculcate an understanding and appreciation of the rights, privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic, upwardly mobile national economy) is complicated by the paradox of 40 years of socialism. This great paradox lies in socialism's great achievement of industrializing an agrarian society while not only educating a largely illiterate population but also producing students whose linguistic,

mathematical and scientific skills are sought after by Western Europe, Britain and the United States. However, at the same time, socialism eroded Bulgarian's connection with traditional cultural values embodied in the importance of individual initiative and the worth of traditional Orthodox Christian principles. So present-day Bulgarian are in search of their "North Star", so to speak, by which I mean a set of core values and beliefs that can provide a sense of equilibrium and security as they tackle the challenges posed by economic and military integration into the West, while still being geographically located in the East.

While Bulgarians search for that equilibrium, the European Union is introducing an array of projects to enhance Bulgaria's infrastructure. Some examples include (I) a 156 megawatt wind farm in the Kavarna region, (II) modernization of two wineries and the establishment of a third employing green field production techniques, (III) updating of pharmaceutical production facilities, (IV) privatization of the Bulgarian Telecommunications Company (BUTEKO) to improve its financial performance and operating efficiency, (V) improving the international

standard hotel infrastructure and competitive standing of the Hermitage Grand Hotel, a five-star development in Golden Sands on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, (VI) development of international standards in retail facilities (i.e. malls) in Bulgarian regional cities to attract quality tenants to the local market, (VII) €50 million in credit lines to Bulgarian banks for on-lending to private sector companies for industrial energy efficiency and small renewable energy projects, and (VIII) development of multiple, local infrastructure projects dealing with water utilities, waste management, municipal building and local road rehabilitation.

Conversely, the United States for its part should present Bulgarian leaders with clear expectations for their role in North Atlantic Treaty Organization's strategic and logistical planning as well as the "War on Terror." Additionally, the Bulgarians have earned more of our economic assistance of their commitment of troops to Coalition Forces in Iraq, as that conflict has entered its fifth year.

Throughout all my experiences in Bulgaria, a reoccurring theme resonated for me more than any other. Whether at the Rila Monastery or Veliko Turnovo University, it was one of tradition passed down over the generations. It was because of tradition that I came to Bulgaria. You see I was raised on a rich, familial, oral history that valued education. My maternal grandfather -- who died before my birth -- encouraged his children to study Spanish during the 1920s. When one of my aunts replied, "Why should I study Spanish? I'm not going to Spain," he answered, "But Spain is coming to you." He was preparing his children for the larger world of the late 20th century. Bulgaria is taking far-reaching steps to prepare her children for the current millennium in ways that leaders in the United States should embrace, support, and even emulate.

I love Bulgaria

Mark J. Henn
Senior Lecturer in Psychology
University of New Hampshire



*Mark Henn
(first from left
to right)*

Of course, I am biased; I had the best possible introduction to Bulgaria, and the best imaginable hosts to show me around. I cannot adequately express my admiration and fondness for the Bulgarian Fulbright staff. The work they did, and the results they achieved, are my new standard for excellence. If the Bulgarian Fulbright women can't do it, it can't be done.

Why do I love Bulgaria? Wow... there are so many reasons. The biggest reasons happen to be individual people, but even the smallest reasons are important enough not to simply ignore. For one, the best water I have ever tasted, I drank from an artesian well in Etura, using a copper ladle chained beside the stream of water. For another, it is a tradition that, when climbing up or down Mt. Vitoshka, you greet your fellow hikers with a friendly and well-received "dobar den"—good day! Another trivial reason: on one street, the traffic might consist of a mix of Mercedes Benz automobiles and... horse-drawn carts. And they co-exist just fine.

Before I get to the big reasons... In our introduction to Bulgaria, we were not given the most appetizing of pictures. The security specialist from the American Embassy (to be fair, it was sort of his job to frighten us) warned us of thieves, muggers, dangerous buses, pickpockets, prostitutes, and more. The worst I experienced was one taxi driver who charged too much. The U.S. Public Affairs Officer at the American Embassy was, if anything, worse. He painted a picture of a country plagued with problems; Bulgaria is, demographically, old, uneducated, poor, unmotivated, and looking to leave for a better life. Ah, but the countryside was beautiful, though! (Again, in fairness, he later apologized, in writing, for the impression he gave.) Well... he was right about the countryside, at least. And he may have been right about the other claims as well—but I have taught statistics, and I know that averages are abstractions, and that the interesting stuff comes in looking at variability from those averages.

The biggest reason I love Bulgaria (aside from the Bulgarian Fulbright staff) is one person. Strangely enough, he was not someone the Bulgarian Fulbright staff introduced me to, although those people are very very high on the "why I love Bulgaria" list. I did first hear about him from a Fulbright representative, though, so he was not a complete surprise. The biggest reason I love Bulgaria is... a bagpipe player, a busker, who plays in the center of Sofia, near the Alexander Nevsky church. I

was told he was "a national treasure", and that he played bagpipes in the park nearly every day. I looked for him for a few days without luck, but did find him eventually. He really is a treasure. He loves his country, his Bulgaria; his music tells the stories of Bulgaria, happy and sad. He was surprised and delighted to find that I, an American, had learned so much of Bulgaria's history (all thanks to the Fulbright presentations!) We talked for a while, and he asked me if I wanted a happy song or a sad song; I asked for a sad song, because I would soon be leaving. He played for me a sad song, a song about a daughter being taken by a foreign conqueror (yes, I know which one, but it is not important here), and a mother's lament. I think there were tears in his eyes as he played; I do not know for sure, though, because I could not see so clearly through the tears in my own eyes.

A busker, a street musician, has every reason to be cynical about a country that has him literally playing for his supper. This man loved Bulgaria, in spite of and because of her history. And I love Bulgaria, because of him, and because of the Fulbright staff, because of a cynical businessman we met on Shipka Street, because of an artist with a Nikon camera, because of teachers in Sofia, Veliko Tournovo, Bourgas, and Plovdiv, because of a tour guide who loved the Boyana Church like a mother loves a child.

I love Bulgaria because the answer to "Moje li?" is "Moje, moje!" Although the Embassy representative told us to be careful, I never once found anyone who was not proud to be photographed, interviewed, questioned, or (my favorite) met for dinner. No one ever denied Bulgaria's history, but no one ever dismissed Bulgaria's future. The most cynical Bulgarians we met were staying in Bulgaria; it was not perfect, but they could own their home, and they could see opportunity on a near horizon.

The Fulbright staff quite clearly put a lot of thought, and a lot of work, into our visit, and all of it paid off. We were introduced to people who were chosen specifically to meet the needs of our projects—researcher, artist, teacher, judge... Our speakers were incredibly knowledgeable and approachable; our visits to museums, monasteries, schools, etc., were uniformly wonderful and invariably useful—this was a visit custom-tailored to our needs, and every bit of it is credit to the Bulgarian Fulbright women.

I can't wait to return.



*Ann Ackerman
and Mark J. Henn*

A Fulbright Journal: Bulgaria

Robert E. Antonucci
 Librarian
 Sodus Middle/High School, New York

The following entries are based on my journal and blog entries during my Fulbright-Hays Program in Bulgaria. This is an attempt to document some of my experiences.

Sofia, June 26, 2008 (journal entry)

Bulgaria has been different from Greece, more run-down in some ways but also unique in comparison with Western European countries I have visited. In Greece we were on the road a lot, staying only one or two nights in the same place. But here we have spent most of this first week in the same hotel, sleeping in the same bed. That has been nice. And here so far, we've had a lot more lectures from experts on current Bulgarian issues than we did in Greece. Food has been generally good. Meat is served at almost every meal. We've eaten in a number of different restaurants. Most were very good with a nice variety of traditional dishes, but we weren't crazy about the Happy Bar and Grill chain restaurants. One of my favorite dishes was the shopska salad made with fresh tomatoes, vegetables, and Bulgarian feta cheese. (*p.s. I've been making my own shopska salads now that I'm home.*)



Deserts have been consistently good and tasty.

Yesterday we visited two private high schools in Sofia, The First English Language School and The American College of Sofia. Both are highly ranked according to the new country-wide matriculation test. Facilities are not up to U.S. standards with no handicapped access and narrow stairwells. The newest school buildings we saw were probably thirty years old. The teachers were articulate and knowledgeable. It was very interesting talking to them. Their challenges seem very similar to those in American high schools.

Sofia, June 29, 2008 (blog entry)

We've had a week of immersion in Bulgarian culture. Lectures by experts in art, literature, history, dance, the economy, and politics have been punctuated with an amazing folk music concert and terrific Bulgarian food. We visited two private high schools and had the chance to hear about the challenges in high school and college education. Bulgarian schools are just starting to deal with a high stakes national test that ranks schools nationwide. Some of the

issues seem very similar to those in American high schools. This afternoon we walked to the Fulbright offices to compare notes about our curriculum projects that we'll submit after we get home. Tomorrow we'll be back on the road heading for Veliko Turnovo, Shumen, and Varna. (Check your Bulgaria maps.)

Varna, June 29, 2008 (blog entry)

We've crossed most of the country since Saturday morning. A long bus trip took us to Etura for lunch and a tour of the Etura Ethnographic Complex, a sort of outdoor museum similar to Colonial Williamsburg on a smaller scale. Crafts people create in wood, metal, fabric, and silver and sell their wares in small shops along the main street of a recreated eighteenth century village. Waterpower runs all the lathes and knitting machines in the village. At each end of the street women washed newly made carpets in swirling water-powered washing machines.

At the ancient capital Veliko Turnovo, we walked around the business district to see amazing views of the hills and the valley on which the city is built. We then climbed to the top of the fortress where Bulgarian kings once lived. The Ottoman Turks took control of Bulgaria after defeating the king's troops during a bloody battle at the fortress in 1393.

After working up a sweat climbing up to the fortress in the 90+ degree heat, we met with the English language department of prestigious Veliko Turnovo University. They didn't seem to mind that we were pretty disheveled when we arrived. We discussed education in both countries and discovered that many of the problems are the same: inadequate funding, changing standards, and the difficulties in preparing students for a global economy. Many of the people we met at the university had dinner with us later that day. I had



dinner with the English department's librarian. She invited us to back to a park near the fortress to see the nightly light and sound show that reenacts the famous battle with the Turks. After we arrived at a good viewing area, no one was really sure if there would be a show that night. It seems that each night's show depends on whether enough tickets for the show were sold that day. By nine o'clock, it was getting pretty dark, and I didn't think it was going to happen. But all of a sudden, simulated bombs started to explode, simulated fires were touched off, and the battle was on. There was supposed to be sound effects and classical music to accompany the light show, but "technical difficulties" sabotaged the audio portion. In spite of that glitch, it was a very impressive show. Mark took some terrific pictures with his camera mounted on a tripod.



After we left Veliko Turnovo, the landscape flatten out, and farming seemed to be the main activity. After stops in Shumen and Arbanassi, we arrived at the Black Sea port of Varna. The village of Arbanassi was once home of wealthy merchants who built sturdy houses for defense. The bottom floor of the house was made of stone and housed the animals and food storage. The second floor, made of wood, was larger than the first and was supported by cantilevered beams. We lunched in Shuman and met two staff members from the Fulbright office at the university there. The rather unattractive city was crowded with those run-down apartment houses was saw in just about every city. When we arrived in Varna, we discovered our hotel was across the street from the beach umbrellas, sand, and a large aquatics center. My front facing room had a gorgeous view of the Black Sea beach and the harbor with freighters coming and going. A block from our hotel the Sea Garden Park extended along the shore for a mile or so. Between the park and the beach a pedestrian walkway was crowded with people of all ages strolling and taking in views of the beach and the blue-green water.

Bourgas, July 1, 2008 (blog entry)

We arrived at the Black Sea port of Bourgas yesterday. On the way we drove through some of the hotel construction along the shore. Gorgeous modern hotels and trashy souvenir shops were crowded next to each other. It was easy to see why the biggest industry in Bulgaria right now is construction. This area is booming! We also toured the coastal village of Nessebar with its unique architecture and numerous churches. We had lunch overlooking the sea with a brisk sea breeze blowing through the open windows of the second floor dining room. The highlight of the meal was the fish chowder served in traditional, brightly colored Bulgarian pottery. A flammable liquid in the soup bowl's saucer was lit so that the chowder stayed warm. The flame quickly burned out, but the soup was warm.

The teachers of the English Language High School of Bourgas

met with us this morning. Despite poor funding, the school had an exciting program with many American style extra curricular activities and sports. From the outside the school looked as though it wasn't open at all with brush growing all around and a broken iron gate at the entrance. But the interior of the school was in good condition. Apparently, most of the budget went toward maintaining the school's programs. We met several teachers and two student council officers. Both the teachers and the students seemed very dedicated to their school, and the students were given a lot of responsibility in planning and running those extracurriculars the school was known for.

We had dinner on our own that night, and everyone seemed to be thinking about the trip home. Tomorrow we'll leave for Plovdiv and then head back toward Sofia.

Sofia, July 4, 2008 (journal entry)

Wow! I haven't written in this journal since June 26. I've been slipping. I kept up better in Greece. Today's the Fourth of July, and the reception at the U.S. Embassy that I'd been looking forward to was rescheduled. Originally we were supposed to attend a reception at the embassy, but it was rescheduled to a time when we couldn't attend.

This will probably be my last post from Bulgaria. Today we toured Plovdiv's wide pedestrian mall and old town with its national revival architecture. We ate dinner at the Puldin Restaurant that was built over Roman ruins and bought pottery directly from a potter in her tiny studio. We walked to Plovdiv University to meet with the English Language Department. Like some other schools we visited, the outside of the buildings looked run-down while the interior was in good condition. The English language library was divided in two adjoining cramped buildings, and the library collection was located in the basement accessible only to the staff. We did find out that a new library is under construction.

The next morning when we were ready to leave, there was a little mix-up with the bus. There were some animated discussions between the Fulbright staffers and the bus driver. The bus sent by the bus company looked too small to hold all of us and our luggage too, but the driver was able to eventually cram us and all of our stuff in. It would have taken too long to get another bus all the way from Sofia. He then whisked us off to the Todoroff Wine Cellar which has been recently expanded and remodeled. We received a lesson on how to evaluate wine and then tasted three varieties. We were served an excellent lunch (and more wine). After cleaning out the small wine store, we were back on the bus. The wine and that big lunch was the cause of some serious "busnosis" that swept all of us on the way back to Sofia. Most of us were sucking air on the way back (except for Mark and Annie. They never slept.). We really enjoyed all the stops on our road trip, but it was good to be back to the familiar haunts of Sofia. Many of us felt it was like coming home.

Yesterday we returned from a loop of the country. Veliko Turnovo, Shuman, Varna, Bourgas, and Plovdiv were stops on the way. In between the cities, we visited the villages of Etura, Arbanassi, Nessebar, and Sozopol. We saw a lot of Orthodox churches and national revival architecture. The ride back to Sofia was uneventful, and we

were glad to get back. As we rode into the city, we recognized the streets, the shops, the cafes and the monuments. We had spent a lot of our time in Bulgaria here. We were starting to get comfortable in Sofia.

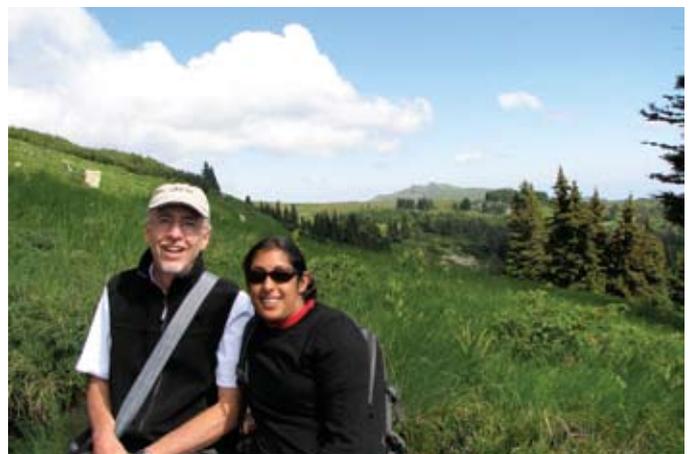
We had a wrap-up session this morning with Fulbright staffers. We discussed our experiences in Bulgaria and filled out written evaluations. "The ladies" prepared a slide show with music that spanned our time in both Greece and Bulgaria. The pictures brought back recent memories of mountains scaled, ruins toured, meals eaten, friends made, and lessons learned. It has been an amazing trip with an amazing group of people.

Tomorrow we'll be free all day to do last minute shopping, pack our bags, and rest for the trip back home. Sunday a trip to Mount Vitosha is planned followed by dinner at a fancy restaurant, dress up clothes required. Then Monday it's an early flight home for most us.

Sofia, July 6, 2008 (blog entry)

Our Fulbright time here is quickly running out. It seems like it was a long time since we were attending our orientation in cool, rainy Chicago. Today we rode the gondola up to Vitosha National Park and hiked partway up the mountain. One of our first outings in Bulgaria was a climb to the summit; now our last activity is a second trip to Vitosha. Sunday evening our farewell dinner was held in a restaurant in one of Sofia's tallest buildings. The picture windows on three sides of the restaurant gave us spectacular views of the sun setting on the city and the distant mountains, fitting images for our last day.

Taxis will pick us up at 4:45 a.m. tomorrow to begin the journey home. Wow! What a trip it's been! I'll be going through my notes, guide books, and pictures for weeks when I get home. None of the early dire warnings from the American embassy staff came to pass. No one was ripped off at an atm or by a taxi driver; no one was pick-pocketed or stabbed on public transportation. We'll have memories of spectacular landscapes, friendly people, and their customs. We'll have knowledge of the country's long and sometimes tortuous history and of a country currently going through profound changes. The Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission has met its goal of expanding our knowledge of Bulgaria and its culture. Now it will be our goal to spread that knowledge to our students, friends, family, and colleagues.



Three Short Weeks in Bulgaria

Ralph L. Esposito
Professor of Art
Carroll College, Montana

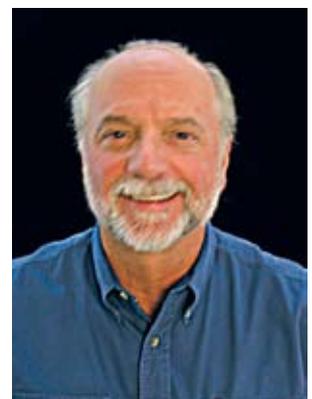
As we rode the bus through the switchbacks and over the mountains into Bulgaria I felt a twinge of *džija vu*. The landscape was beautiful and somewhat reminiscent of my home in Montana. Pictures simply do not tell the story nor do my words.

Before my journey I attempted to get some knowledge of my destination by reading a short history of Bulgaria. The long and complex story of the country that was to be my home for the next nineteen days was overwhelming. It made American history seem like a short story. I knew that being there was going to bring this place, its people, and its history into focus.

We drove for several hours watching the countryside roll by before we entered the metro web of Sofia. The traffic was terrible and we crept along, stopping frequently. The delays gave me some time to ponder what I was seeing. There were some derelict, crumbling buildings but within a block or two there were also very modern looking, brand-new structures that were on the cutting edge of

contemporary architecture. It was a stark contrast that seemed to coincide with the change only twenty some years ago from socialism to democracy. Suddenly we were in downtown, crossed the Eagle Bridge and arrived at the wonderful Crystal Palace Hotel. It isn't a completely crystalline castle with glassy turrets but it is certainly one of the best hotels I have ever stayed in. Beautiful rooms, large comfortable beds, and a first-rate restaurant were only some of the amenities offered. We ate, relaxed, and slept.

Sofia is a large and energetic city with bustling crowds of people and great parks. There are almost two million inhabitants in the





city. The whole state of Montana has less than one million residents and is more than three times the size of the entire nation of Bulgaria. The size, traffic and energy of Sofia were a bit intimidating even

though I have been in many large cities. I spend most of my time in Helena, which has a population of about thirty five thousand. Sofia is old and new, has steeped in seven thousand years of history and yet still constantly changing. As an artist and art professor for over thirty years I was in awe and felt deep appreciation of the visual aspects of Sofia from the yellow cobblestone streets downtown, to the Thracian treasures in the museums. As I mentioned I have visited many cities in my life but Sofia holds a special place in my heart. The people, the history and the art have left a lasting impression.

The Rila Monastery with its profusion of iconic images, domes, arches and high contrast patterns was an unforgettable place to see and experience. Included in the list of the memorable is the Boyana Church, over eight hundred years old with incredible artwork and an incredible curator. His name was Belcho Belev (Mr. White White!) and he described the murals with a passion and intensity that held us transfixed. The National museum of History, the National Art Gallery, the Archaeological Museum, the Alexander Nevski Cathedral, the St. George Church, and the view from Mt. Vitosha are just a few of the wonderful experiences we had.

And then there was Boyan Dobrev, a Bulgarian artist and professor. We were introduced at our opening reception at the Crystal Palace Hotel for our group. Also attending were all of this years Bulgarian Fulbrighters, just prior to their departure to the US. I was very impressed by Boyan's intellect and energy. We talked for two hours and decided that ART can change the world if only people would let it. After the reception Boyan invited me to visit him in his studio. I gladly accepted and asked if some friends could tag along. He agreed and we made arrangements to meet on the weekend because we then had a free day. That Saturday afternoon I walked over the Eagle Bridge with Mark, Paul, and Amy, and met Boyan by the park. We followed him through the park and a few blocks farther to his studio. He immediately offered beer and began to show us his work. There were his beautiful drawings and paintings plus murals that had been made as a group project with his students. On his computers we saw his three dimensional virtual reality panoramas of many important historical and artistic sites throughout Bulgaria. After pizza, we viewed his latest work that used photographs, Rorschach inkblots and colorization. He is a true master and his work inspires me. Unfortunately, we missed the opening of his new show at the National Art Gallery by about a week, but his art, intellect, and generosity were unforgettable.

On June 24th we were honored by a special musical concert at the National Art Gallery, formerly the Royal Palace, in Battenberg Square. It is still hard to believe that it actually happened. We were first treated to the vocal ensemble Yulangelo, a group of men who sing traditional sacred songs in beautiful four part harmonies. Next was a world-class violinist, Joseph Radionov, accompanied by his wife, Zorniza Radionova, on the piano. They played some of the most complex music I have ever heard with such flawless ease. I was stunned. Then, Viktoria Vassilenko a lovely young girl who is obviously a piano prodigy played incredibly beautiful and difficult music perfectly. Finally we listened to the "Denitsa" Quartet that included four women who sang traditional village songs and make up a part of the larger National Folklore Ensemble. They created harmonies that were very different from what I am accustomed to but sounded wonderful. It was quite an honor that this entire concert was just for us!

Another day and another experience, although of a lower level of artistic quality. I danced. Not very well, mind you, but I did dance. Got lessons from an expert, but I am still not very good. Unfortunately, I was coerced at dinner into dancing with a man in a mask while wearing bells around my hips. Pretty funny, I think, but I really don't want to see the video.

We traveled to schools including the First English Language School and the American College of Sofia, which is actually a high school. Their high school system allows students to specialize in language, vocations, the arts and normal studies. The Bulgarians are such dedicated teachers. They love their work and their students. They do the work they love for meager rewards. I felt empathy and kinship with them.

We listened to Bulgarian writers, Alek Popov and Kristen Dimitrova, as they read their works and then had interesting conversations over lunch. I found that the creative climate of Bulgaria was almost tropical in its fertility. The recent political and sociological changes have brought freedom that seems to incubate innovation. That freedom allowed writers to address subjects that had been forbidden. They began to condemn Communism, discuss sexual





themes, and parody the classic literature of Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian traditions are highly valued by the people and were clearly evident in contemporary society. On the way to Veliko Turnovo we visited the Ethnographic Complex at Etura. It is a reconstruction of an entire village exactly as it might have been 150 years ago. Everything in the village is powered by running water including the washing machine for rugs, the lathe for wood turning, sewing machines, potters wheels and more. The village was packed with artisans and craftsmen creating their work using the traditional methods. The sound of hammering came from the shops of coppersmiths and silversmiths; the smell of fresh baked goods wafted from the bakery, and the sound of running water was a constant.

There are so many indelible memories from my travels in Bulgaria. As we traveled across the countryside watching the never-ending

fields of cadmium yellow sunflowers blurring by the windows, it reminded me of the rich taste of butter. Some of our other experiences included seeing the Blessed Savior Church in Veliko Turnovo with its modernist murals and the Tsarevet Fortress laser light show. We swam in the Black Sea, took in the white sandy beaches at Varna, climbed through the Aladja Monastery, carved into a cliff and the marveled at ancient bay of Sozopol. We met the professors at Bourgas Free University and Veliko TornoVo University and talked about students, curriculum, problems and challenges. To dine at a seaside restaurant on the peninsula of Nessebar and explore the ruins, churches and harbor at is not to be missed.

Arriving in Plovdiv meant, that sadly, we had begun our last week in Bulgaria. We met professors from the English Department of Plovdiv University plus a young woman from the Peace Corps. We then set out to tour the city. The next day, we traveled to Brestovitsa in the Thracian lowlands. This is prime Bulgarian wine country and we were treated to a fabulous lunch and wine tasting at the Todoroff Wine Cellar. Finally, we had to begin our bus ride back to Sofia for the wrap-up sessions and the conclusion of our journey.

The people of Bulgaria are warm, friendly and generous. Bulgarian history and culture are phenomenally rich, complex and fascinating. Their arts rank among the best of the world. Their struggle through the end of socialism into a democratic society continues and moves steadily forward. The entrance to the European Union brings more upheaval and change. While the Bulgarians are aware of the problems and challenges their society faces, I know that they will succeed. They are strong, vibrant and refuse to allow any obstacles to stand in the way of progress for their beloved country.

It was an honor to have been given the opportunity to travel and study all that is Bulgaria. I loved visiting and experiencing this country first-hand. Someday I hope to return.



БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН

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Fulbright Office News

NAFSA 2008 Annual Conference & Expo Washington, D.C., May 25-30, 2008

Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, program officer Maria Kostova and educational advisor Snezhana Teneva participated in the annual NAFSA conference on "Shaping the Future of International Education" held in Washington, D.C., on May 25-30, 2008.

NAFSA's largest-ever annual conference drew more than 9,400 attendees from approximately 110 countries in Washington, D.C. to celebrate NAFSA's 60th anniversary. More than 3,000 participants came from countries outside the United States. About 4,500 of all attendees were NAFSA members, and approximately 1,275 were attending the annual conference for the first time. The International Education Expo hosted 683 exhibit booths from around the world.

This year's conference theme, "Shaping the Future of International Education", examined the value of international education in the larger context, innovations in campus internationalization, the



Thousands of NAFSA Conference participants attended the opening plenary session.

effects of global and regional trends, as well as the impact of technology.

Bulgaria was represented at the EducationUSA Country Fair with a special stand which was visited by over 200 participants.

National Academy of Art Student Exhibition



On June 17-24 Judith Michelle Hill hosted an exhibition on "Digital Imaging: Experimental Textile and Graphic Design on Paper and Cloth" at the American Corner of Sofia City Library. The exhibition was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy, the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission, Force Delta, Ltd., and the National Academy of Art. It presented works by Michelle Hill and the Textile Faculty students who participated in her introductory computer graphics

classes at the National Academy of Arts.

Judith Michelle Hill holds a master's degree in fine arts from Howard University in Washington, D.C. In AY 2007-2008 she came to Bulgaria as a Visiting Fulbright Scholar at the Textile Department of the National Academy of Arts in Sofia.



Michelle Hill with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Sofia, Bulgaria, July 9, 2008.

To Chicago and Back

Polya Ilieva

Fulbright graduate student at State University of New York in Binghamton
NY. Major: M.S. in Socio-Cultural Anthropology, AY 2007-2008

Overlooking Miami skyline from a plane at night might be a childhood dream for many people. But enjoying this view knowing that it is the harbinger of a whole new and exciting experience as a student in the United States is already more than that. As the first day unravels, being a Fulbrighter means so much more than can possibly be described in a few pages. And there will be as many stories as there are people. During the Orientation program in the US prior to the beginning of the academic year, the first thing that the new experience reveals is a confirmation of the old saying about how big and yet how small the world is.

The mood around the chatty room is festive and colorful from the native costumes of so many different countries. One look around and I realize for the first time in my life I am sitting in one room with almost the entire globe. I might not have heard much about Trinidad and Tobago before, let alone expect to meet a native, but there he is - a person born and raised there is sitting just down the row from me. Just a coffee-break later I discover I already know what has been happening with Mexico's economy in the past few decades, why does Taco Bell food have nothing to do with real Mexican taste, and just how far is Tokyo from Miami. Thus, only an hour later, I already know that the whole week of Orientation program will not be enough to ask even half of the questions that have always intrigued me about life in other countries. Yet, it is so inspiring to know that all these answers are just a "hallo" away from me.

Being part of such an immensely diverse group of people may seem like an overwhelming experience at

first. But only till you realize that what you have in common obfuscates all differences that may appear at first sight. We are all in the very beginning of a new and exciting journey, we are a little scared and as the days go by we also realize clearly that it is an exceptional honor to be part of this group of people and to share a hope for a better future. What is more, we realize that someone has already invested their hopes and trusts with us. It is a challenge but it is also a great recognition. And we have to live up to the expectations of being Fulbrighters - people who, as the organizers of the Orientation program assure us, will be getting the "wow" status till the rest of our lives.

Surprisingly, however, we exclaim the first "wows" ourselves as we discover how much new information there is in store for us during Orientation week. What seems like a very intense schedule in the beginning turns out to be a very well balanced time-table combining lots of useful tips and handouts with fun activities. Representatives of the Institute of International Education inform us about important issues such as J-1 visa status, and spend the entire week with us, always ready to respond to our inquiries regardless of whether we approach them during the official sessions or during the various entertainment activities we enjoy throughout Orientation. Faculty and staff at Miami Dade College, hosting our Orientation program have prepared a variety of educational break-out sessions for us and we are encouraged to choose between talks on Managing time, History of American Art in the United States, Government and Politics in the USA, American Values and Beliefs, Historical Overview of the United States, Jazz: America's Classical Music, and more.

We have the chance to benefit from the experience and knowledge of professors in the fields of Business, Art and Philosophy, and Social Science.

Our schedule includes also a panel discussion with current Fulbright recipients who share with us the challenges they had just a year ago, when they were walking in our shoes, and give us useful tips on how to resolve different situations. Their smiles and confidence alone are enough to relieve many of the concerns that have bothered us while packing our suitcases of US student life expectations. As the program continues, we also find out more about our legal rights and responsibilities from the Assistant College Attorney at Miami Dade College. We meet with the Director of International Student Services at Miami Dade. Her friendly attitude, competence on international student issues, and concern for the students give sighs of relief to those who were concerned their particular needs as international students might not be taken into consideration.

In relation to our particular concerns as international students, another fun activity – the Cross-Cultural Awareness Workshop, divides us into groups of people who have lived in the US before and first-time visitors. This serves as another useful tool to promote friendly interaction with fellow Fulbrighters, to share experiences and concerns. Amazingly, my own concerns echo the ones expressed by my friends from Pakistan, Costa Rica, South Africa, and Japan. The friendly atmosphere and the excitement that we share about the new experience which lies ahead somehow marginalize all concerns and make them seem too trivial as compared to what our future as Fulbrighters has in store for us. In short-term, our future is not less exciting at all as it includes enjoyable dinners with the new friends we have made during Orientation, a breath-taking boat tour of Biscayne Bay, as well as many other fun activities. Needless to say, the friendships established during this week as well as the inspiration from meeting young and motivated people with a wide ranging scope of interests are long-lasting and priceless.

While packing my things and getting ready to leave Miami to head up North to my host institution I make sure I take with me all the enthusiasm, emotions, and motivation I have accumulated throughout the past week. Sadly, I can't take with me the friends I have met in Miami. Little do I know all the people that are about to become



Polya Ilieva with her fellow-Fulbrighter Nikolay Yanev at the Rockefeller Center in New York.

my closest friends at school, along with my academic supervisor, will turn out to be... Fulbrighters as well. While keeping in touch with people I met at Orientation, and establishing new friendships with other Fulbrighters at school I am able to formulate at least one of the many reasons why the Fulbright experience deserves every bit of its "wow" status – it opens the door to and helps establish bonds with an amazing community of inspired people from around the world.

As I get ready to attend a Fulbright-organized Enrichment Seminar in Chicago next month, I am both excited that I will have one more chance to benefit from a variety of interesting activities and new acquaintances with fellow Fulbrighters, and I am also fully aware, that I will only then be fully entitled to give my article the name..."To Chicago and Back."

Out of America

America, Out of America: *Looking at one of Bourgas's religious institutions*

Amy E. Kuiken
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AY 2007008

Finding America in Unexpected Places

While many things during my stay in Bulgaria have surprised me, I find that the most astonishing things have not been the unknown but the familiar. My high school students, for example, can recount multiple episodes of "Tom and Jerry" and know what an Everlasting Gobstopper™ is even though they can't find one in Europe. I was perhaps more astounded to discover that my teacher colleagues know the words to The Battle Hymn of The Republic. (Later one woman explained to me that they had been taught this song under socialism because "it was the song of the American worker.") As certain pieces of America surface in wonderful and strangely different contexts, I wonder how these particular American cultural artifacts made it to Bulgaria in the first place, and why others didn't; American tentacles of influence seem to have an unpredictable life of their own. For better or worse, it's America, out of America.

Finding Part of America in Bourgas

Another unexpectedly American experience for me in Bulgaria has come from interacting with a local church congregation on the Black Sea coast. My husband Jon and I attend an Evangelical Protestant Christian service in our town, Bourgas. Visiting on our first Sunday morning there, I was stunned to see how much it looked and sounded like my parents' church in the United States. The band, the overhead projector, the chairs, and the building itself were reminiscent of my experience in a church that at first glance could be categorized as a typically American one—the people even sang and prayed in familiar-sounding ways.

About The Church

At the beginning of September, I was too shy to break out my Bulgarian. We must have been taken for hopeless non-Bulgarian-speaking tourists, because few ventured to talk to us that first day. My husband and I were also considering visiting some other



Amy with her husband Jonathan in Koprivshtitsa

places of worship in the area, but during the following week, a woman from the church spotted us on the street and immediately recognized us (or maybe just my tall, hard-to-miss, red-headed husband). She flashed us a big toothy grin. We decided to go back again and meet the people, no matter how terrifying our Bulgarian was.

I hadn't even managed to finish squeaking out *dobro utro* the following Sunday when we found ourselves being greeted by teens, octogenarians, the pastor's family, university students, Roma, ushers, small children enraptured by Jon's hair... Since then, I have had the opportunity to meet many of the four hundred or so people in the congregation, and play my violin with the church's band during the service. We were even invited to work with the teenage group on Sunday nights. (The teenagers are mostly interested in our views on Iraq, and for some reason, Boston's "Big Dig" project. They also want to know what we think of Bourgas. "If you could describe Bourgas in one word, what would it be?" Simple questions, really!) In short, we have been welcomed into this community by many people who have told us some of their stories and are eager to hear our own. However, although this church environment may feel a lot like "America, out of America," I have learned that the stories that describe these Bulgarians are, nevertheless, quite different than the stories of my fellow church-goers in Massachusetts.

Stories from The Church

Take Pastor Zhivko's story, for instance. He speaks perfect English, plays the alto sax, has a great voice, a beautiful family, and an active commitment to politics in Bulgaria. Pastor Zhivko made it clear that things weren't always so bright. From the seventh grade on, he had been blacklisted under communism for being a practicing Christian. It looked like there would be little public prospect for him, he told us. Nevertheless, when the chance came to move from Bulgaria to the US after the fall of socialism, he and his family never considered it. Though others hoped to move, "we decided our place was here, and that this was where we should stay." Pastor Zhivko was a city councilor when we met him, and he continues to exclaim how amazing it is to go from being a marginalized thirteen-year-old to a city councilor in the fourth largest city in the country. His wife, Nellie, provides a UN-quality English translation for Jon and me through earphones every Sunday morning. She has a great singing voice, too. In fact, the whole family sings. Once, on a dare, they stood up in front of the church and belted out "O Happy Day" in English and in Bulgarian. They were even invited to perform the song at Bourgas' English language school last year, where we teach. Everyone loved it.

Then there's Petya. Petya is a 24-year-old Bulgarian woman full of intellectual curiosity and well-informed opinions about

Bulgaria and the United States. She likes cornbread and laments that she can't find American peanut butter in Bulgaria. A graduate of the University of Economics in Varna, she now teaches English in Bourgas and will be pursuing a Masters degree in tourism in Sofia. She has been to the U.S. (Atlanta, Georgia) twice as part of a summer student work program and, from this experience, knows more of what to expect from my American husband and me when we invite her over for tea, marshmallows, and mini peanut-butter cups. She has described her feelings on what it is like to not be an Orthodox Christian in Bulgaria, and how this might have shaped her. Petya has helped us answer some questions about Bulgarian culture and language, and invites us to go on long walks in Bourgas' famous sea garden to discuss differences between American and Bulgarian life. She is determined, as we are, to keep a connection between her American friends and her Bulgarian life in the future.

Will and Mariela's story is a little different. Will is a British ex-pat of modest means who moved to Bulgaria after his wife passed away a few years ago. He met Mariela at the Evangelical Protestant church in Bourgas, dutifully continued to improve his Bulgarian language skills, fell in love, and the rest is history. We invited Will and his wife to our apartment for dinner one evening, and Will translated Mariela's story for us: Recently she had been looking for a job but was having trouble being hired. Her résumé showed that she had worked for a Pentecostal church previously, and had also been involved in other Christian aid organizations in Bulgaria. Some potential employers were immediately suspicious of her motives for wanting to work ("they assume that I'm a 'crazy evangelical,' she said)—especially since she had a British last name, and therefore must be married to "an English guy with loads of money" and no need for a job. "There are certain things some people immediately think about you," Mariela said, "when they hear that you are Protestant. Or married to a Brit."

Some Social Background: Protestantism in Bulgaria's Past

As Mariela's story suggests, there is not a wide-spread understanding of certain churches outside the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria at this time. (Catholicism is arguably the notable exception.) Nor is the history of these churches here well-known to many Bulgarians or Americans today. Detailed sources in English are hard to come by and in many cases historical accounts in Bulgarian have been obscured.

Yet the history is worth looking at. The earliest protestant missions in Bulgaria—the British and Foreign Bible Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Countries—arrived in the 1850s. Their missionaries did not intend to start churches but to organize a spiritual revival for the people in the Orthodox Church by preaching and distributing spiritual literature. Nevertheless, as a result of their work, the first Protestant



Halloween at school

churches were created. Led both by foreign missionaries and educated Bulgarians, the churches built hospitals, daycare centers, orphanages, and schools. There were reputable Protestant schools in Plovdiv, Lovech, Stara Zagora and Samokov and especially in Tzarigrad—Robert College graduated two Bulgarian prime ministers, seven ministers, dozens of judges, lawyers, doctors and bankers. In 1871, a few erudite Protestants also finished translating and printing the entire Bible into contemporary Bulgarian. Compared to Orthodoxy, Protestantism was not very important, but it was still producing some of the cream of society.

Methodism and Congregationalism are two of these Protestant denominations which have been in Bulgarian for over a century and a half now. They were thought to have been eradicated under communism, and most in the West were astonished to discover in 1989 that these churches had survived and in some cases even grown. Many people are surprised to find that this is true of Evangelical Protestant churches as well—that they are indeed not a new phenomenon. The Evangelical Protestant church in Bulgaria also has roots in the mid 1800s out of the same missionary movement, helping to found the same schools, contributing to the same goals. Bulgaria's first Evangelical church

was founded in Bansko in 1868 (some sources say 1871) by Peter Ushev and Marko Petkanchin—and if you ever go to Bansko, the Evangelical church there has pictures of the first ministers on the walls and has stories to tell about the beginning years. Bourgas's first Evangelical Pentecostal church still exists today and was founded almost 90 years ago by Ukrainian Missionaries.

But even though Methodist and Congregationalist churches today have a somewhat recognized place in the fabric of Bulgarian society (it is important to note, however, that in most places their institutional role is still quite marginal)—this is not the case for the Evangelical church. The Evangelical church today does not fit into most people's ideas of what a Bulgarian institution is. It is often seen as America out of America. Why?

Some More History: The Protestant Church After the Changes

With increased religious freedom after 1989 in a newly-open society, most Bulgarian Christians who looked to the West for support or guidance got it; missionaries (from the United States, Germany, Sweden and England to name only a few places) began working in Bulgaria, and congregations from abroad sent basic food and living supplies to the Bulgarian churches during a time of tremendous upheaval.

Pastor Zhivko said that Evangelical churches were particularly transformed after the falling of the Iron Curtain. While Evangelicals and Methodists and Congregationalists had all been singing the same songs from the earliest missionaries for over a century, it was mainly Evangelicals who had already been pushing for change in their worship well before the changes. "Finally," said Pastor Zhivko, "we were encouraged to do what we had already decided to do: make our worship more contemporary. We now had information about churches abroad that were more free and contemporary, and we saw that they were good churches. We saw that there were places that it was okay to be a Christian, and it added to our dignity and freedom to believe." He maintained that it is "the same Evangelical spirit which has been in Bulgaria for the last 150 years—only the form has changed. We continued to encourage our congregations to approach anything new with a sound critical attitude."

Most Congregational and Methodist churches today are still conservative in terms of worship style. The changing face of Evangelical churches, however, resulted in what felt like a new surge of Evangelical institutions in Bulgaria. In all fairness, after 1989, many new Evangelical churches did appear (several in Bourgas alone—though it is important to note that all of these were led by Bulgarians, not founded by new American arrivals).

In this way, the Evangelical church is sometimes perceived as a relative newcomer. With its new face appearing in Bulgaria

less than 20 years ago after the ending of the socialist system, its present-day manifestation does not have the more established status that Methodism and Congregationalism enjoy. Being 'new' and without a historical connection to the Orthodox Church, members of these Evangelical congregations are viewed as participating in a cult. And at the moment, there is little or no popular distinction between many of the new religious arrivals: Mormons, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, or Jehovah's Witnesses. Given the history of this country, the social experience of being a Protestant in Bulgaria is, to put it mildly, quite different than being one in the US—despite obvious similarities inside Bulgarian and American Evangelical churches.

Concerns About the New Churches: Too Much Like America?

Even among those who do not consider Evangelical Protestantism in Bulgaria to be a cult, there are concerns that churches like this one in Bourgas are, deliberately or unconsciously, creating a "Little America." For some, this raises a sensitive issue of the association between Christianity and the spread of certain cultures. Just how did Evangelical Protestantism in Bulgaria come to (seem to) be an instance of America, out of America—when the people in the church are not Americans? And how much of a problem is that?

Why So Similar?

In my view, theological principles of justice and grace are not taught in a vacuum, nor can they be; the church is a social institution and thus it is necessarily mediated through existing cultures and people, encompassing their symbols, language, discourse strategies, and the particular emphasis placed on these things by these different groups. Because of the close relationship between religion and culture, it is possible to imagine how easily American Evangelical missionaries might have passed along their church culture (guidelines on how long to speak, what words to use in prayer, what kind of music if any will be used, where to sit if you sit and which way to face, how to decorate a sanctuary, and so on) in addition to just their theological teachings. This happens no doubt for expediency—it would take a long time to decide all the details.

In the end, this kind of borrowing might lead to uncannily similar experiences among very different groups of people. At our church in Bourgas, everything from the style of prayer, to the order of worship to the songs (several of which have been translated out of English and into Bulgarian) to the children's programs, to bible studies on Wednesday nights—is seemingly from an American church culture. (And although I'm not sure how many of the non-Americans here are aware of the extent of the similarities, purportedly many have noticed it.) My husband put it succinctly when discussing how much the Evangelical Protestant church in Bourgas was like my parents' church at

home: "It was like someone flipped a switch and it was in Bulgarian instead of English."

Potential Problems With Being Too "American"

I was initially suspicious of this. I had wanted something authentic, not a copy. Although I would have been hard-pressed to say exactly what an authentic Bulgarian Evangelical Protestant worship service would look like, it seemed to me in the very first moments that something should have been different. With myself at first feeling like this church was a pipeline transporting an American church culture to Bulgaria, I suspected that in the eyes of some Bulgarians, this particular American church culture was being viewed simply as America itself.

Whether piping in America is good or bad, their misperception can be deceptive; although there is a relationship between religion and culture, fundamentally they are not the same thing. It is this misunderstanding—seeing the church solely as America out of America or unthinkingly promoting all things American—that may impact the social future of these kinds of churches in Bulgaria; there is the potential for people who reject an American presence in Bulgaria to reject the Evangelical Protestant church as a legitimate Bulgarian institution as well.

Getting the Story All Wrong

If the Evangelical churches in Bulgaria feel American, it turns out that is not because of any extensive borrowing or missionary control. Yes, the church in Bourgas has been helped by missionaries from the United States for the last 150 years—but also by missionaries from other countries. And really, if truth be told, the Evangelical church here has been more or less autonomous.

Perhaps part of the American influence comes from after the changes in Bulgaria—there was a growth in access to books and media like never before. There was a flood of English-speaking



people in the 1990s and, as always, Bulgarians were open to the English language. "Before that, we just listened to Beatles and Pink Floyd and Queen which were secretly smuggled in. After the changes we had access to sermons and contemporary church music from America and Great Britain," said Pastor Zhivko. While Bulgarian Evangelicals "wanted to have a contemporary church that [would] fit our culture, our goal was never to be an 'American' church." He continued, "In fact, we are very careful about how we do things in our church because we don't want people to think we have an 'American' faith." For Pastor Zhivko, "faith is Bible-based, not culture-based" anyhow, but since "we have no idea what's in the minds of people—their political or cultural considerations—when we choose something in English, for example, we do it for a very specific reason, not just because we can."

While Bulgarian Evangelical churches are not imitating American churches, Pastor Zhivko recognizes that there are similarities. "You know, there's diversity in America's churches and diversity in Bulgaria's churches, too... But maybe some churches in Bulgaria are similar to some churches in America simply because they are based on the same interpretations of the same Bible."

The Bulgarian Evangelical Church in the Future: "A Very Bulgarian Expression of Faith"

Given this, I suppose it is normal for this church to feel "American." In fact, it will probably continue to feel American, but I am quite comfortable there and no longer hesitant over the likeness, after some reflection: Evangelical Protestant congregations have been influenced here by foreign models of format and emphasis since the 1800s. It makes sense that certain aspects would resemble the American model that I am familiar with, which is also influenced by what is sometimes referred to as 'the global church.' (Interestingly enough, Pastor Zhivko's wife Nellie said that Bulgarian Evangelicals have always perceived themselves "as a very Bulgarian expression of faith.")

Perhaps in the future, more worship songs will be written in Bulgarian and not translated out of English and perhaps elements of the service will be transformed to accommodate small differences in a rapidly transforming culture, and so on. Maybe some of the things that are being done now will pass away, while new culturally salient things will develop. I don't know.

A majority of Bulgarians outside this tradition may still continue to view it as a marginal sect in the foreseeable future, but in terms of style and culture, it will continue to be decided by Bulgarians. It will be something that teaches Evangelical Protestant understandings of justice and grace transmittable across all cultures and languages—but something Bulgarian.

Whatever it is, it's not really America, out of America.



Visit to Sozopol

(Author's note: It is worth mentioning here that, in terms of statistics, it is just as American to not go to church as it is to go to church. I certainly do not maintain that being American means being Evangelical. This is only a part of America, out of America.)