

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees in AY 2013-14

On June 21, 2013 the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission held a one-day pre-departure orientation for the Bulgarian Fulbright grantees who will study, teach and live in the U.S. during the academic year 2013-14.

Recipients of grants for AY 2013-14 are 5 senior scholars, 1 Hubert Humphrey Fellow, 7 graduate students, one doctoral student in the visiting researcher category, and two researchers under the Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society. Projects and fields of study cover a wide range of disciplines: engineering, history, linguistics, theology, philosophy, business, law, architecture, sociology, human rights, finance, screen-writing and bluegrass music.

The Fulbright Commission expresses its gratitude to the Bulgarian Fulbright alumni and the U.S. Fulbrighters in Bulgaria for their valuable contribution to the pre-departure orientation with comments, anecdotes and practical advice.

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



Senior Scholars

Dr. Agata Manolova

Field of specialization: Engineering

Project: Design and Implementation on Face Emotion Recognition System

Home institution: Technical University of Sofia, Faculty of Telecommunications

Host institution in the U.S.: University of Arkansas-Little Rock, AR

Dr. Krassimira Daskalova

Field of specialization: History

Project: Gendering Nation States: South Eastern Europe, 19th-20th Century

Home institution: Sofia University "St.Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy

Host institution in the U.S.: Stanford University, Stanford, CA

Dr. Angel Angelov

Field of specialization: Linguistics

Project: Globalization and the Future of the Languages in South Eastern Europe

Home institution: Sofia University "St.Kliment Ohridski", Department of Slavic Studies

Host institution in the U.S.: University of Washington, Seattle, WA

Dr. Stefka Kantcheva-Mihaylova

Field of specialization: Theology

Project: In Conversation with God: Liturgical Exegesis of the Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition

Home institution: University of Veliko Tarnovo, Faculty of Orthodox Theology

Host institution in the U.S.: Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA

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Dr. Dimitar Vatsov

Field of specialization: Philosophy
Project: Rethinking Power and Self (American Contexts of Critical Theory: Butler, Fraser, Allen)
Home institution: New Bulgarian University-Sofia, Department of Philosophy and Sociology
Host institution in the U.S.: Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

Hubert Humphrey Fellows

Diliana Markova

Field of specialization: Law/Human Rights
Home institution: Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria
Host institution in the U.S.: American University, Washington, D.C.

Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society

Lilyana Drumeva O'Reilly

Field of specialization: Music
Project: Bluegrass: More than just American Music
Home institution: Balkan Bulgarian Television
Host institutions in the U.S.: International Bluegrass Music Association, Nashville, TN; Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY

Todor Yalamov

Field of specialization: Civil Society
Project: Two Decades of Civil Society Development in Bulgaria: Governance Risks and Windows of Opportunities
Home institution: Center for the Study of Democracy, Sofia
Host institution in the U.S.: Center for International Private Enterprise, Washington, DC

Graduate Students

Stoyan Kiryazov

Field of study: Business Administration
Home institution: University of National and World Economy, Sofia
Pursued degree: MBA
Host institution in the U.S.: New York University-Leonard N. Stern School of Business, NY

Katerina Vaseva

Field of study: Architecture
Home institution: University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia
Pursued degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: The New School-Parsons School for Design, New York, NY

Maria Dimitrova

Field of study: Law
Home institution: King's College London, UK
Pursued degree: LLM
Host institution in the U.S.: Georgetown University - Law Center, Washington, DC

Ivan Genchev

Field of study: Law
Home institution: University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, Paris, France
Pursued degree: LLM
Host institution in the U.S.: John Marshall Law School, Chicago, IL

Maria Petrova

Field of study: Business Administration
Home institution: University of Economics, Varna
Pursued degree: MBA
Host institution in the U.S.: Florida International University - Graduate School, Miami, FL

Mariana Sabeva

Field of study: Screenwriting
Home institution: Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA

Todor Raykov

Field of study: Innovation Management & Entrepreneurship
Home institution: Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: MS
Host institution in the U.S.: Temple University - Graduate School, Philadelphia, PA

Non-Degree Research Grants for Doctoral Students

Lilyana Marinova

Field of study: Finance
Home institution: University of National and World Economy, Sofia
Host institutions in the U.S.: State University of New York-Stony Brook, NY; University of Michigan-Ann Arbor-Ross School of Business, Ann Arbor, MI



Fulbright Office News



Final Nominations for Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees AY 2014-2015

Fulbright Interview for Bulgarian Fulbright grantees in AY 2014-2015, June 12, 2013

Members of the nomination committee (from left to right): Richard Damstra, Commission Treasurer; Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director; Prof. Grace Fielder, Fulbright Senior Scholar

Wrap-up Seminar for Fulbright English Teaching Assistants AY 2012-2013

On April 25-27, the Fulbright Commission welcomed the AY 2012-13 Fulbright English Teaching Assistants for a Wrap-Up seminar in Sofia. The young American teachers presented their academic and community outreach work to members of the Fulbright Commission, America for Bulgaria Foundation, the United States Embassy and their School Principals.

The presentations were organized by geographical regions, with groups unifying their experiences around common themes and speaking about them individually. The ETAs primarily discussed achievements in schools and community, adjustment challenges, and prospects for the next grantees. Various extracurricular activities were highlighted with an emphasis on the first Speech and Debate Tournament initiated by a group of Fulbright teaching assistants.

The seminar hosted a round-table for school principals to discuss issues of administration and institutional co-operation.



Official Opening: From left to right, Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Natalia Miteva, Director of Programs for Education, America for Bulgaria Foundation



Participants



Teachers, presenting on the ETA program

2013 Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) Lottery

Our FISI Lottery winner this year is Teodora Stankova, M.A. English Philology student at "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" University of Veliko Turnovo.

The draw took place on Friday, June 21st, at the Fulbright Study Center, during the annual orientation for Bulgarian Fulbright grantees in AY 2014-15 and the farewell party for departing American grantees. The lucky ticket was drawn by Fulbright graduate student Lisa Le Fevre.

Congratulations, Teodora! We hope you have an amazing experience at FISI 2013!



(From left to right) Prof. Grace Fielder, Fulbright Scholar; Dr. Lisa Le Fevre – Fulbright Researcher; Prof. Julia Stefanova, Bulgarian Fulbright Commission Director; Iolanta Koprinova, Bulgarian Fulbright Commission Staff; Ana Todorcheva, Cultural Affairs Assistant, U.S. Embassy; Benjamin Berk, Fulbright ETA in Sofia; Katie Seto, Fulbright ETA in Haskovo.



The name of the lucky winner: Teodora Stankova!

Young Talent Awards



Dr. Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission (middle); Margarita Shahpazova, state expert, Science Division, Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (left); Margarita Hristova, junior expert, Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (right), and the three winners of "Young Talent" National Competition organized by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, and supported by the Fulbright Commission.

Fulbright Accomplishments Book Launch



Fulbright alumnus Boyan Dobrev presenting his book "Principles of Visual Composition" at the "Academy" Gallery of the National Academy of Arts in Sofia

Undergraduate Admissions and Scholarships, AY 2013-2014

In 2013, fourteen of the 75 regular visitors to the Fulbright advising center were accepted to US universities and colleges with a total scholarship amount of 1,976,784 USD (\$ 494,196 per year x 4 years). Five of all accepted students were granted full scholarships and seven received partial financial aid. Among the schools where our advisees will be studying are: Princeton University, NJ; New York University in Abu Dhabi (NYUAD); Drexel University PA; Ramapo College, NJ; Dickinson College, PA; Pennsylvania State University, PA; Mount Holyoke College, MA; Franklin and Marshal College, PA; Ithaca College, NY; Colorado State University, CO and Long Island Conservatory, NY.

Here is a list of universities and scholarships granted to Bulgarian applicants:

College or University	Scholarship Amount
New York University in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates	\$65,300 (full scholarship)
Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA	\$56,000 (full scholarship)
Reed College, OR	\$52,500 (full scholarship)
Princeton University, NJ	\$51,750 (full scholarship)
LaFayette College, PA	\$51,000 (full scholarship)
Mount Holyoke College, MA	\$49,646 (full scholarship)
Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA	\$46,000 (full scholarship)
Dickinson College, PA	\$26,000
Franklin and Marshal College, PA	\$26,000
Ramapo College, NJ	\$26,000
Ithaca College, NY	\$18,000
Colorado State University, CO	\$17,000
Long Island Conservatory, NY	\$3,000
Pennsylvania State University, PA	\$6,000

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.

Letter to Bulgarian Alumni

Уважаеми колеги и приятели, Сигурно мнозина от вас знаят или се досещат, че тази година е юбилейна за Комисия „Фулбрайт“. Отбелязваме двадесетгодишнината от нейното създаване в началото на 1993г. след подписване на междуправителствено споразумение между Република България и САЩ през есента на 1992г. Комисията започна своята дейност в един изключително драматичен за България и Източна Европа момент и не беше лесно да се утвърди като институция в условията на продължителна турбуленция. Има някаква ирония в това, че две десетилетия по-късно отново се намираме в сеизмична ситуация, но пътят, който ние извървяхме дотук, водеше и води само нагоре. Комисия „Фулбрайт“ успя да се затвърди на българска почва, да израстне и да постигне завидна устойчивост благодарение на подкрепата на правителствата на България и САЩ, на безукорната почтеност, компетентност и



Prof. Dr. Julia Stefanova
Executive Director Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange

отдаденост на членовете на Комисията и нейния административен състав и ценната помощ, която вие като алумни ни оказвахте през годините. Тази рядка хармония и синергия между индивиди и институции се дължи на изключителната сила, значимост и непреходност на фулбрайтовата кауза: постигане на дълбоко взаимно разбиране и разбирателство между човешките общности чрез обмен на знание, образование и културни ценности.

През 2013г. общият брой на членовете на българо-американската Фулбрайтова общност е 1081: 533 българи и 548 американци. От тях 899 /431 българи и 478 американци/ са постъпили в нейните редици след учредяване на Комисията. Причината за многократното увеличаване на Фулбрайтовите стипендианти след 1993г. е многолика: социално-политическите промени, новият дух на отношенията между България и САЩ, демократизацията и професионализацията на критериите за селекция, как-

то и многобройните дейности, които Комисията разви, за да направи широкодостъпна информацията за Фулбрайтовия конкурс, за американската образователна система и възможностите за обучение и специализация в САЩ. Мнозина от вас участват в тях: консултантска дейност, езиково обучение, провеждане на компютърни и други тестове, локални информационни центрове, семинари и международни конференции, Летен Фулбрайтов институт и др. Менюто на ежегодния Фулбрайтов конкурс също се обогати и включва разнообразни категории стипендии за следдипломна специализация, професионална квалификация, преподавателска и научна дейност.

С една дума, дотук балансът е добър, дефицити и пасиви почти няма и можем с радост и гордост да отбележим юбилея на своята зряла младост или млада зрялост.

Комисия „Фулбрайт“ подготвя тържествено честване на своето двадесетилетие около средата на ноември тази година. Надявам се да се видим с голяма част от вас, да се поздравим, да поговорим и помечтаем заедно за бъдещето на Фулбрайтовия обмен, българското образование, наука и култура. Имаме и намерението да отбележим събитие с учредяването на стипендия за млади български магистранти и докторанти с финансова подкрепа на български Фулбрайтови алумни.

Апелирам за вашата активност, за да осъществим за първи път една прекрасна идея!

Желаещите да се включат могат да изпратят средства в следната сметка на Комисия „Фулбрайт“:

Българо-американска комисия за образователен обмен

Райфайзенбанк (България) ЕАД
Ул. „Съборна“ 5
София 1000
Банков код BIC: RZBBBGSF
IBAN: BG79RZBB91551061044014

Поздравявам сърдечно всички носители на стипендията „Фулбрайт“ с нашата достойна годишнина и изказвам искрена благодарност за продуктивното съпричастие и добра воля!

Юлия Стефанова
Изпълнителен директор



To Chicago and Back

“Towering toward the blue”*

Dr. Reneta Bozhankova is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Russian Literature, Faculty of Slavic Studies, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She has published research books and articles on contemporary literature, digital genres, e-learning, e-publishing, teaching foreign languages. As a Fulbright senior scholar in AY 2012-13, Dr. Bozhankova taught and conducted research at the University of Kansas, Lawrence.



Dr. Reneta Bozhankova at the University of Nevada, Reno

Looking back to my 4-month stay as a Fulbright scholar at the University of Kansas during the fall semester of 2012, I invariably see one picture – the blue sky, on which were engraved the contours of the color-shifting trees in the city of Lawrence, Kansas. This beauty and tranquility accompanied me and, I can say without hesitation, inspired me in my work, which commenced there and then, in the middle of the continent and the torrid August, and came to a conclusion during the crystal clear days of December.

Almost immediately upon arrival I started lecturing at the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures and this facilitated my adaptation in the USA, for indeed is the university as an institution universal - not only in the scope of its sciences, but also in the consistency of rules, and the habitualness of everyday routine - probably around the world, and definitely at my two universities, as I used to think of them at the time – the one in Sofia, the other in Kansas. Although, there was one very visible difference. While walking the campus streets, I ran no danger of wondering where I was – I passed energetic young people clad, adorned with innumerable variations of the University’s mascot – the likeable the Jayhawk (the name combines two birds - the blue jay and the sparrow hawk) present everywhere, as were the two KU colors – “Crimson and the Blue”.

The first places I spotted on the campus map were the KU library buildings. One of the highest rewards of my scholarship was the chance to work in the KU Libraries. Its exceptionally rich resources in the fields I am interested in – Slavic studies, literary studies, digital humanities and e-learning, enhanced by the helpfulness and the counseling service of the library representatives, made my stay at KU particularly worthwhile. I realize that the accumulation and indexing of these resources – in printed and digital form – is a result of the exceptionally professional work of the Library staff and the KU departments over the years. Each and every book, article, e-resource I needed, could be found and delivered almost immediately. Looking back and from a distance now, I can see myself walking along Jayhawk Boulevard carrying a pile of volumes and anticipating the pleasure of reading, learning, discovering.

My scholarship at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, can be viewed from the dual perspective of professional development and experience in a new academic environment, on the one hand, and knowledge and comprehension of the American cultural specifics and way of living, on the other. I had a course of lectures at the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, which gave me the opportunity to work with American students and lecturers

* The title of this text is a verse from the song of The University of Kansas “Crimson and the Blue”.

and find out a lot about their learning and teaching methods and the academic system as a whole, as well as to encounter alternative viewpoints and approaches to the cultural and literary topics included in the curriculum. The lectures I attended at the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (CREES) gave me the unique chance to contemplate European history and its present period from different viewpoints and from a distance, meeting European academics in an American university context. Another very important part of KU for me was the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities, its conferences and seminars. Getting acquainted with scholars from various American universities during these events was highly beneficial for my qualification in the sphere of e-learning, e-publishing, and digital writing, since it allowed me to meet with structures and policies related to digital humanities in general.

During the period of my scholarship I had the wonderful opportunity to take part in the 2012 Fulbright Visiting Scholar Enrichment Seminar "U.S. Elections in a Battleground State: Observing Democracy in Action", Reno, Nevada, October 31 - November 4, 2012. It was a period of intensive and active communication between the representatives of Reno authorities, institutions and citizens, and Fulbrighters from more than 60 countries. We learned a lot about Reno and Nevada, their history and present debates; about the educational system; about ethnic specificity and organizations addressing the most vulnerable members of society; about the City Council and the Sheriff's responsibilities; about political figures and volunteers. I established personal contacts with Fulbright colleagues from many countries, we discussed not only American topics, focused by the organizers, but also a lot of global issues feeling in this multilingual and multiethnic microworld of the seminar how small and charmingly diverse our planet is. The seminar in Reno, the "Global Nevada", was an unforgettable event!

During my whole stay in the USA, I gained a multifaceted experience of American culture; I learned about and deeply understood the American life more than I have ever dreamed to have the chance to do. Diversity, dignity, responsibility, family and community life, political attitudes – these are only some of the aspects and characteristics of this society I was able to observe and reflect on.

Looking back at the experiences I underwent in the United States, I would like to remark that, while getting to know the culture and traditions of my hosts, I was in return able to tell them about my culture and Bulgarian history, holidays, current events, nature and landmarks. I rejoiced in the fact that many of the people whom I met had not only heard about Bulgaria, but knew details from its newest history and were interested in its present state; some had visited my homeland, recalled words and places, showed me the pictures they had taken and recounted their memories from these journeys. I am convinced this wasn't merely their way of being courteous, but also a sign that when we are guided by curiosity, goodwill and tolerance, we manage to preserve over time the understanding between people.

During the period of my scholarship I met a lot of American people in their everyday life, in the process of performing their professional duties or community service. As a result, I have brought home cherished memories of my new-found friends from Lawrence, Kansas, and the Fulbright family. To them, as to my students and colleagues at KU, and as to the many encounters with people, who went out of their way to spend time with me and to share the warmth of their hospitable homes, I owe this life experience. The amiable university mascot – the Jayhawk, is the lingering token of these days, when, I am convinced, I really saw a blue bird perching in the high branches in the garden of the marvelous house which was my home in Kansas.

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



БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН "ФУЛБРАЙТ"

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To Chicago and Back

First bluegrass and country music festival in Bulgaria!

Lilyana Drumeva

Research Scholar for the Study of Civil Society

AY 2013-14

The weekend of the 29th and 30th June brought both excitement and happy memories for Bulgaria's bluegrass and country music scene. The country hosted its first festival – "Country West Fest"! it took place at the American pub "Saloon" in the town of Bankya, near the capital Sofia.

Visitors enjoyed an outdoor concert on Saturday in the sunshine, with performances by Lilly of the West (bluegrass/swing), Kalliana (country-folk), Tony Serkedjiev (blues/rock and roll) and Anatoli Iliev (trad. country).

A highlight of the program was the performance of mandolin virtuoso and singer Martino Coppo from Italy. He is the main musician of Europe's leading bluegrass band "Red Wine" and a board member of the European Bluegrass Music Association (EBMA). Martino showcased his solo repertoire, which included songs from Red Wine's latest CD "Red". Later, he was joined by "Lilly of the West" for a set including; classic bluegrass songs, such as: "Molly & Ten brooks", "Think of what you've done", "Long journey home", "Blue night" and many others.

Visitors enjoyed a variety of music, excellent American cuisine as well as other entertainment such as horse riding, kid's program, Black Jack games and raffle tickets with numerous prizes.

On Saturday, Country West Fest was attended by the mayor of





Bankya – Rangel Markov and his deputy – Plamen Simeonov. The shows emcee was Bulgarian radio legend – Tom Sprostranov.

On Sunday, the festival continued with full power, despite the rain. It was moved indoors and offered a cozy, warm atmosphere. The program featured Lilly of the West, Roy Sturn & Stetson (hot country), Cash only (Johnny Cash tribute) and Martino Coppo (mandolin, octave mandolin, vocals). Martino invited also musicians from Lilly of the West on stage for a performance of classic bluegrass and country hits.

The show continued with games, raffles, excellent food and drinks and people stayed until late, enjoying the happy and positive mood.

The festival was a true milestone for the development of bluegrass and country music in Bulgaria. All involved should be proud of their achievements which received lots of positive feedback, and hopefully will become regular tradition on the events calendar in Sofia.

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Out of America

Brian Farrell

Brian Farrell is director of academic support at the University of Iowa College of Law, where he also holds appointments as adjunct assistant professor of international studies and adjunct lecturer in law. He is a co-founder and president of the Innocence Project of Iowa. Brian, an Iowa native, received his J.D. from the University of Iowa in 1998 and an LL.M. in international human rights law from the National University of Ireland Galway in 2002. As a Fulbright senior scholar in Bulgaria in AY 2012-13, he taught and conducted research at Sofia University.



Dr. Farrell with his students at Sofia University

So you're moving from Iowa to Bulgaria?"
 "Right."
 "Do you speak... what's the language there?"
 "Bulgarian. No, I don't."
 "Do you know a lot about Bulgaria?"
 "Well, not a lot, but I'm excited to learn."

This was a common conversation for me last summer.

I've often thought that the best destinations are those that weren't on your list. My experience as a Fulbright Senior Lecturer in the faculty of law at Sofia University certainly falls into that category. Unlike many of my Fulbright colleagues, I didn't begin my experience with a particular country, or even region, in mind. Instead, I focused on trying to identify an award that was seeking someone with my background and skills, with a large degree of flexibility as to where that might be. Happily, this approach led

to my selection as a Fulbright scholar and an incredible experience in a place I have grown quite fond of.

I arrived alone in Sofia in mid-September, while my wife and daughter initially remained in Iowa. In the first days I met a number of people in my neighborhood and at my host institution. Most were exceedingly friendly and welcoming. I enjoyed the warm temperatures, the sidewalk cafes, and the sound of clarinet music through my open windows at night.

In early October I attended the law faculty's formal opening of the semester, and days later I taught my first class. I had been cautioned that my students might seem reserved because they are accustomed to lecture-based courses, but I found them to be quite engaged and willing to share their opinions. The topic of my course was wrongful convictions, which examined the lessons learned from the cases of more than 300 Americans who have

been convicted of crimes that DNA evidence later proved they did not commit. My students learned the basics of the American criminal justice system, and then examined the common causes of wrongful convictions, some of which are the result of very universal factors such as the fallibility of eyewitness identification. I regularly asked my students to take a comparative approach and consider whether the problems that have occurred in the United States could occur in Bulgaria. By employing this approach, I learned a great deal about the Bulgarian system while my students became familiar with some very real problems that are not limited by geographic boundaries.

In early November I was invited to participate in the ceremony marking the 120th anniversary of the law faculty. This was a lovely event, and for me it embodied Bulgaria's rich educational and cultural traditions. It occurred in the university's beautiful central auditorium and involved a number of speakers from the university, the government, and the legal community. The highlight for me was a set of pieces performed by a string orchestra composed entirely of members of the Sofia bar. The performance prompted a colleague to lean over to me and say matter-of-factly, "everyone in Bulgaria is talented. You might not know it, but everyone has a talent."

Throughout the semester I had opportunities to talk with individuals and groups beyond the university. The topics of my invited talks were varied – a seminar on the causes of wrongful convictions at the Institute for Legal Studies, a discussion of the independence of courts and judicial selection with the Sofia Law Society, and a lecture on international law for students at the American University in Bulgaria. I also enjoyed the individual contacts that I made with Bulgarian judges and lawyers. I learned a great deal about the workings of the system, the professional community, and legal education. I also made some good new friends.

My wife and daughter joined me in Sofia in late October. Naturally, we were a bit curious to find out what it would be like to fly across the Atlantic with a toddler to live in an Eastern European capital where we didn't speak the language. It turned out to be a more positive and enjoyable experience than we could have expected. Bulgaria is very child-friendly, and wherever we went, our daughter tended to break down whatever barriers might have existed. She would make a new friend at the

playground and run ahead of us into our favorite café to give the server a hug. The hardest part was flying to other European countries and realizing that pushing a stroller no longer gets you to the front of the queue.

Sofia was a comfortable home for our family. While it may not have the same tourist draws as some other European cities, we found a lot to appreciate. The city has a tremendous number of green spaces, and in the warm weather we were in one of the parks daily. Hiking on Vitosha Mountain and the history of Boyana Church were only a short cab ride away. We explored a number of Sofia's great museums, became regulars at the ballet, and enjoyed many delicious yet inexpensive meals in the restaurants around our neighborhood. Air travel from Sofia is convenient, and we paid visits to Istanbul, Austria and Hungary, Venice, and Athens.

As positive as my experience was, it would be unrealistic to suggest that there weren't difficult moments, or that Bulgaria doesn't have its problems. I saw plenty of poverty, and I heard people talk pessimistically about the economic and political challenges that the country still faces twenty years after the end of communism. I regularly tried to remind myself that my perspective was impacted by the privileges I enjoyed due to my relative wealth and access to resources. And I personally had moments of frustration or found myself missing home. But, that is a part of any new experience, and fortunately those moments were few and far between. What's more, they often led me to a greater appreciation of the support I received from my new Bulgarian friends and neighbors, my host institution, and the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission.

Any endeavor is more enjoyable and more enriching when you embrace what is new and different and actively work to seek out the positive aspects. When I first decided to apply for the Fulbright program, I didn't know what opportunity might arise, but knew I could commit myself to getting the most out of whatever it was. As it turns out, Bulgaria and its people exceeded my expectations. My time was personally and professionally transformative. I am fortunate to have had this experience, and I hope that I was able to make some contributions in return.

Disclaimer:

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