

# Fulbright Commission Activities in 2014

## Message from the Executive Director

Dear Fulbright grantees, alumni, colleagues and friends,

The year 2014 is behind us, closing chapter 23 of the history of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission. Looking back, it was yet another dynamic year full of events and manifold activities designed according to the 2013 program plan and successfully carried out to promote the Fulbright exchange and uphold the image of the Commission.

### GRANT ACTIVITIES

In AY 13-14 the number of US grantees was 38: six lecturers, three graduate students, twenty-seven English teaching assistants, and two senior specialists. The lecturers came from a wide variety of fields: law, political science, applied linguistics, computer science, journalism, and business administration. They were placed at Sofia University, the Military Academy, the University of Plovdiv, the University of Mining and Geology, and the Higher School of Insurance and Finance in Sofia. The Fulbright specialists were experts in speech pathology and semiotics, hosted by South-West University in Blagoevgrad and New Bulgarian University in Sofia.



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

Most senior scholars volunteered to visit and make presentations at other Bulgarian universities and educational institutions and share their expertise with their Bulgarian colleagues.

In the period under review, the Commission also hosted three US graduate students in geography, art & technology, and creative writing. They were placed at New Bulgarian University, the University of Library Studies and Information Technology, and an independent NGO. Along with their academic research, the students engaged in a variety of other activities such as English language teaching, translation and editing. Some of them volunteered as judges for The Bulgarian Forensics League's Speech and Debate tournament, the CORplus Bulgarian Creative Writing competition, and taught courses at AUBG's International Summer Camp.

The group of AY 2013-14 English teaching assistants supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation arrived in the summer of 2013 to attend the Fulbright International Summer Institute

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where they were offered a ten-day professional training organized by the Commission staff with the participation of Bulgarian mentor teachers, school principals and EFL experts.

The wrap-up seminar held in May 2014 was a great opportunity for all US Fulbrighters to showcase their achievements, discuss issues and share innovative ideas.

The AY 14-15 competition resulted in the selection of 40 US grantees: five senior scholars/ lecturers in occupational therapy, journalism, American studies, theater and storytelling; five students in creative writing, history, music, anthropology and economics, and 23 ETAs to teach English at high schools all over Bulgaria; six ETAs from AY 2013-2014 were approved to stay for a second year and one for a third consecutive year. Thus, the total number of ETAs in AY 2014-15 is 30.

For the thirteenth consecutive year, the Commission offered its unique two-week summer institute in August 2014. Along with many international students, the new group of American grantees also attended taking a variety of interdisciplinary courses, including Bulgarian language.

Due to the increased number of ETAs and the specific professional training they needed, the Commission staff organized a special 10-day program in September including workshops in lesson planning; classroom management; teaching literature; the Bulgarian grading system etc. The workshops were led by ETA mentors and other experienced Bulgarian teachers of English, ETA alumni and returning ETAs. Participating in the training were experts from the Regional English Language Office in Budapest. In addition, the ETAs had intensive Bulgarian language training which gave them a good basis for further study.

## U.S. GRANTEES ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Fulbright alumnus and distinguished FISI Professor George Siedel from the Ross School of Business published a book entitled *Negotiating for Success: Essential Strategies and Skills*. The book is partially based on the "Negotiation and Conflict Resolution" class Professor Siedel has taught at the Fulbright International Summer Institute since 2002.

Fulbright scholar Dr. Carol Atkinson published a book she had worked on during her Fulbright grant in Bulgaria. It is entitled *Military Soft Power and Public Diplomacy through Military Educational Exchanges*. Dr. Atkinson visited Sofia twice in 2014 to participate with a paper entitled "The Benefits of US and NATO Military Exchange Programs" at an international conference at the Defense Academy commemorating the 10th anniversary of Bulgaria's accession into NATO.

Fulbright graduate student Minka Stoyanov published two articles, "The Social Cyborg" and "Open Culture: Shifting Ideologies in Art and Technology." Also, she represented her host institution in Varna at the annual EuroDig conference (European Dialogue on Internet Governance) held in Berlin.

Many ETAs started extracurricular clubs to maximize the impact of their work amidst the local community: a salsa dancing club in Dobrich; the Women club in Varna; English test preparation clubs in Pleven, Lovech, Blagoevgrad and other towns; coffee hours in Vidin; baseball and Frisbee practice in Pravets; a Swahili class in Stara Zagora. Worth special mention is the Bulgarian Forensics League, an initiative of six ETAs in 2012, which was enthusiastically supported by most AY 2013-14 ETAs. In 2014, three national speech and debate tournaments were conducted in Sofia, Kardzhali and Blagoevgrad. Three Bulgarian students, winners in the US-qualifier Dramatic Duo division and the Original Oratory division, won a trip to Overland Park in Kansas, where they represented Bulgaria at the Speech and Debate Association's National tournament. In August 2014, the Bulgarian Forensics League was officially registered as an NGO in Bulgaria as *The Bulgarian English Speech Tournament (BEST) Foundation*. After the competitions in Prague and Dubai in 2012 and 2013, ETA Athena Lao's team won the debates at the Regional Round of the World Scholar's Cup in Istanbul, which qualified them for the Global Round in Singapore June 24-27, 2014. Thanks to a successful fundraising campaign and a USD 2000 grant from the Fulbright Commission, the team competed successfully in Singapore, while Athena was presented with the "Coach of the Year" award. The World Scholar's Cup organization was so impressed by Team Bulgaria's enthusiasm and dedication that they decided to host a Regional Round in Sofia, Bulgaria, on November 8-9, 2014.

In the academic year 2013-14, a total of 16 Bulgarian grantees worked in the following categories and fields: five scholars in engineering, history, linguistics, theology, and philosophy; one Hubert Humphrey fellow in the sphere of law and human rights; two civil society research scholars in music studies and sociology; seven graduate students in business administration, architecture, law, journalism, entrepreneurship, and one non-degree doctoral student in finance. Of the eight graduate and non-graduate students, four returned to Bulgaria after completing their programs successfully. The remaining four are still studying in the US. The recipient of the Hubert Humphrey fellowship is back, too, with excellent results from her academic and professional program.

The publicity campaign for the AY 2014-2015 competition yielded a total of 74 applications: 54 for graduate study grants, and 20 in the senior scholar and Humphrey Fellowships category.

The selection resulted in the nomination of five senior scholars, six graduate students, one non-degree PhD researcher, and one recipient of the scholarship for the study of civil society. The scholars come from the following fields: political science, law, environmental science, agriculture and public policy. In the student category, six candidates were approved and are currently enrolled in Master's programs in human rights studies, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, architecture, communications/media and business administration. They were admitted to prestigious universities such as Columbia University, Yale University, University of Florida, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, and Price Business School at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. One six-month non-degree study grant went to a doctoral student in comparative literature with a double placement at New York Public Library and University of California, Berkeley. The winner of the joint Fulbright-Thanks to Scandinavia scholarship is enrolled in a master's program in sustainable development at Yale University. The AY 2014-15 research scholarship for the study of civil society was awarded to a specialist in gender issues and human rights.

A total of 61 applications were received for the AY 2015-16 competition: 41 for graduate study, 17 for research and lecturing, and three for the Hubert Humphrey fellowship. The interviewing committees nominated five principal and three alternate candidates for graduate study programs in education, art management, technology management, molecular biology, business administration and law; five principals and two alternate candidates for senior scholar grants in plant physiology, computer science, ethnomusicology, economics, political science, and e-medicine; two principal candidates for the research scholarship for the study of civil society in regional development and sociology; one principal candidate for the Hubert Humphrey award in public health.

## BULGARIAN GRANTEES ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Dr. Stefka Kancheva from the University of Veliko Tarnovo and visiting scholar at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, MA, delivered a pre-Christmas open lecture on the "Prophecies about the Savior" based on her Fulbright research.

Professor Krassimira Daskalova, a gender studies specialist from Sofia University, gave a public lecture on the role of Bulgarian women in education and law at the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies at Stanford University, California.

Prof. Dimitar Vatsov, a leading philosopher from New Bulgarian University, published several articles in Bulgarian and international journals resulting from his visit to Dartmouth College, NH.

Civil society scholar and musician Lilly Drumeva, who had a joint assignment at Western Kentucky University, KY, and the International Bluegrass Music Association, TN, published a book on popular music, including bluegrass, jazz and country music. With her band *Lilly of the West*, she not only performed but also helped organize the first Bluegrass and Country music festival in Bulgaria.

## GRANT-RELATED ACTIVITIES

During the period under review, educational advising continued to be an important part of the Commission's grant-related activities. The expansion of contacts is evidenced by the higher number of individuals and representatives of institutions that have been reached out to. For example, in FY2013, the number of users of the services offered by the Fulbright Commission was 16,724, whereas in FY2014 it reached 17,152: individual visits – 2,286; telephone inquiries – 2,983; mail, e-mail and fax inquiries – 3,858; library users – 1,781; attendees at outreach activities – 6,094

In 2014, seventeen twelfth-graders, participants in the EducationUSA Program of the Fulbright Advising Center in Bulgaria, were accepted to U.S. universities and colleges with a total scholarship amount of over \$2 million (\$547,450 per year x 4 years = \$2,189,800). Students will be enrolled in the following colleges and universities: Harvard College, MA; Princeton University, NJ; New York University in Abu Dhabi (NYUAD); MIT, MA; Yale College, CT; Yale-NUS College, Singapore; New York University, NY; Middlebury College, VT; Grinnell College, IA; Furman University, SC; Pace University, NY; Eckerd College, FL; Columbia University, NY; Cornell University, NY; AUBG, Bulgaria. Five of the Fulbright EducationUSA Program participants have been admitted on full scholarships to summer schools at prestigious US universities. Five more participants in the Fulbright EducationUSA Program have been awarded ASSIST and YES scholarships to attend U.S. high schools for one or two academic years.

Throughout the whole year, the Commission staff worked hard to expand outreach all across Bulgaria, especially in underserved regions. Our attention was focused on three target audiences: university students, high school students, and representatives of ethnic minorities. The visible result of this activity is the sizable increase in the number of contacts with institutions and individuals.

Fulbright presence was strong at the major international education fairs held in 2014: over 5,000 students and professionals visited the Fulbright stands wherever there were such events in Sofia and other university cities in the country.

The centrepiece of the Commission's grant-related activities was the 13<sup>th</sup> Fulbright International Summer Institute (FISI) which took place at RIU Pravets Resort on August 10-23, 2014. One hundred and five students from Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Germany, Greece, India, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Russia, Slovakia, and the USA took part in the Institute. Among the participants were doctoral and postdoctoral students from the Alma Mater Centre of Excellence at Sofia University. Master's students from the program in cultural diplomacy and the program in communication, language and literature, both offered at Sofia University, also enrolled in various courses and received credits for the classes they had selected. A special feature of FISI 2014 was the series of lectures delivered by the Ambassadors of Turkey, Palestine, Israel and Indonesia to the Republic of Bulgaria. Twenty-seven BA students from the University of Michigan (Ross School of Business) led by Professor George Siedel attended his course on "Negotiation and Conflict Resolution" and participated in a special program which involved meetings with prominent Bulgarian entrepreneurs and visits to business companies. The new group of American Fulbright scholars and graduate students had the opportunity to attend an intensive two-week course in Bulgarian language. FISI offered a total of 13 interdisciplinary courses conducted by 14 distinguished professors and experts from prestigious universities and institutions such as Harvard University, University of Michigan, University of Massachusetts Boston, Arizona State University, University of Dayton, Sofia University, New Bulgarian University, University of Veliko Turnovo, University of Peshawar, Monmouth College, Communications and Human Resources Development Center and the European Parliament.

In 2014, the Commission continued to offer English language training, preparatory courses for TOEFL, SAT, IELTS, GMAT as well as iBT- TOEFL, GRE, EPSO exams and other tests at its lan-

guage center and computer-based testing facility.

As can be seen from the above summary of Fulbright activities, the Commission accomplished quite a lot in 2014. The key to its successful performance as a binational institution of international exchange and education is in the team spirit, the dedication and commitment of the Board and staff members, their competence, professionalism and creativity. Of course, our efforts were supported by dozens of Bulgarian and American alumni, educators, academics and representatives of government and non-government institutions. On top of the list of those to whom we owe our deepest gratitude and appreciation are our donors and sponsors: *America for Bulgaria* Foundation, without whose generous and continuous support some of our most successful projects such as FISI and the ETA program would be unthinkable; *Thanks to Scandinavia* Institute supporting Bulgarian graduate students for eight consecutive years; the US Embassy which, apart from being actively involved in the administration of the Fulbright program, provided funds for the training of the AY 2014-15 ETAs.

In conclusion, I wish all of you a healthy, productive and creative New Year 2015. I also would like to inform you that I have decided to leave the Commission in March 2015, after almost 23 years of service to Fulbright and international education. I feel ready to move on to a new life devoted to my family and other creative activities that I had no time to pursue so far. I extend my heartfelt thanks to all colleagues and friends who have supported me over the years in the effort to create Fulbright in Bulgaria. I am sure that there will be other exciting opportunities ahead that will bring us together again.

*Dr. Julia Stefanova*  
Executive Director



## БЪЛГАРО-АМЕРИКАНСКА КОМИСИЯ ЗА ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЕН ОБМЕН

### УЧЕБЕН ЦЕНТЪР КЪМ КОМИСИЯ "ФУЛБРАЙТ"

- Подготовка за тестовете iB TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, IELTS
- Подготовка по английски език за граждани и фирми
- Подготовка по бизнес английски и бизнес кореспонденция
- Компютърна самоподготовка за iB TOEFL, GRE, GMAT
- Справочна библиотека

### БЕЗПЛАТНИ УСЛУГИ ЗА КУРСИСТИ

- Разговорен английски с преподаватели от САЩ
- Отстъпки при записване за повече от един курс
- Безплатни 10 часа работа с компютър
- Консултации за обучение в САЩ
- Библиотека с учебна и справочна литература

За информация: София 1504, ул. Панайот Волов 1, етаж II, тел. 944 0441, E-mail: [studycenter@fulbright.bg](mailto:studycenter@fulbright.bg), [www.fulbright.bg](http://www.fulbright.bg)

## The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission Appoints Ms. Angela Rodel as New Executive Director



Angela Rodel

The Bulgarian Fulbright Commission is delighted to announce the appointment of Ms. Angela Rodel as the next Executive Director of the Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange, or Bulgarian Fulbright Commission.

Ms. Rodel was appointed to the role of Executive Director after a thorough process that attracted a large number of qualified candidates. Ms. Rodel is a two-time Fulbright Scholar, who first came to Bulgaria in 1996 to study language and folk music at Sofia University. Her studies gave her a solid grasp of Bulgarian language and culture, an experience which deeply informed her graduate studies in linguistics and ethnomusicology in the United States. In 2004, Ms. Rodel received a Fulbright-Hays fellowship to study Bulgarian folk music at the Academy of Music, Dance and Visual Arts in Plovdiv. She is deeply connected with the Bulgarian folk music community and has connections with several well-known Bulgarian folk music groups. Ms. Rodel is also a professional literary translator. Her translations of Milen Ruskov's novel *Thrown into Nature* (2011), Zachary Kara-

bashliev's *18% Gray* (2013) and Angel Igov's *A Short Tale of Shame* (2013) have been published by Open Letter Books. Her poetry and prose translations have also appeared in literary magazines and anthologies, including *McSweeney's*, *Little Star*, *Granta.org*, *Two Lines*, and *Words Without Borders*, among others.

She is enthusiastic about the opportunity to serve as an ambassador of American culture in Bulgaria, as well as of Bulgarian culture in the U.S.

Ms. Rodel replaced Dr. Julia Stefanova, who stepped down after 22 years as Executive Director of the program. During her tenure, Ms. Stefanova oversaw a period of significant growth and improvement that helped the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission maintain the highest standards of excellence that the Fulbright name has come to represent.

Ms. Rodel began her term as Executive Director on March 10, 2015.

## Fulbright Office News

### The Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission Appoints New Members to its Board of Directors

March 27, 2015

The Bulgarian Ministry of Education, the Embassy of the United States in Bulgaria, and the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission are pleased to announce the appointment of three new members of the bilateral Board of Directors of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission. The new members are Professor Kostadin Kostadinov, Deputy Minister of Education and Science; Victoria Melamed, Minister Plenipotentiary, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Dr. Julia Stefanova, former Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission.

These new members join the current members: Elizabeth Fitzsimons, Chairperson of the Board of Directors and Counselor for Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria; Neda Kristanova, Director of the Center for Control and Assessment of the Quality

in Education, Ministry of Education and Science; Maria Metodieva, Family Economic Success Officer, Trust for Social Achievement; Kevin Aspegren, President of the American University in Bulgaria; Thomas Higgins, CEO, Yatoto; Professor Geoffrey Dean, American University in Bulgaria; and Tammy Paltchikov, Educational and Cultural Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria.

The Board of Directors of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission looks forward to continuing to support the successful educational and cultural exchanges that are the hallmarks of the Fulbright Program. These appointments represent the first outcome of the newly announced Educational and Cultural Working Group established during Secretary of State John Kerry's January 15 visit to Bulgaria. We look forward to sharing more accomplishments of this Working Group in the coming months.

### Cultural Enrichment Activities for U.S. Fulbright Grantees



Informal party at the Fulbright Language Training Center in Sofia to mark the Bulgarian National Holiday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>

### Visits of U.S. Universities to the Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center



Marianna Mirchuk, Regional Manager, Eastern Europe, Minerva Schools at KGI, talking to interested students and parents at the Fulbright EducationUSA Advising Center.

## Fulbright Office News

### Visits by ED Angela Rodel and Program Officer Maria Kostova to Trakia University and the NGO "Zeleni Balkani", Stara Zagora



*ED Angela Rodel (right) and Program Officer Maria Kostova (left), presenting at Trakia University in Stara Zagora.*

On March 19, 2015, the Fulbright Executive Director Ms. Angela Rodel and Program Officer Maria Kostova visited Stara Zagora Trakia University and the rescue center for wild animals "Zeleni Balkani". Their goal was to establish spheres of potential co-operation, present the 2016-17 Fulbright study, lecture and research grants, and encourage scholars in the STEM fields to make the most of the Fulbright program opportunities.

## 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 Office News

### Outreach Activities

#### Fulbright Information Sessions



Information session for Fulbright Graduate Study Grants candidates conducted by Program Officer Maria Kostova at Sofia University.



Presentation of EducationUSA Adviser Snezhana Teneva on the U.S. Application Process at 119 Secondary School in Sofia.

#### Visits to American Spaces



(From right to left) Valentina Ivanova, Chair, Friends of America and Snezhana Teneva, EducationUSA Adviser



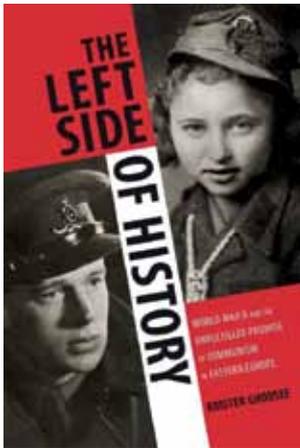
Over 50 students, parents and teachers attended the EducationUSA information session on study opportunities in the U.S. within the February - Month of America events, organized by Friends of America in Kardzhali.

#### Participation in Education Fairs

Hundreds of students and professionals interested in study in the U.S.A. visited the Fulbright booth at the Education Beyond Borders fair in Sofia.



## Fulbright Accomplishments



## Book Launch

Fulbright alumna Kristen Ghodsee, Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Bowdoin College, has recently published a new book. *The Left Side of History: World War II and the Unfulfilled Promise of Communism in Eastern Europe* tells the stories of partisans fighting behind the lines in Nazi-allied Bulgaria during World War II. Kristen Ghodsee turns a heroic story of four Bulgarians, who were part of the resistance, into a gentle, reflective exploration of the idealism that drove them. The book is published by Duke University Press and is available on Amazon.

## Fulbright ETA Jason Syphrett's Students to Represent Bulgaria at the International Speech and Debate Tournament in Dallas, TX, U.S.A.



The winners: (from left to right) Maya Todorova, Kamelia Gazdova and Preslav Vuchev



Jason (second from top right) and his team, together with Claire Sagstuen (second from bottom left)

Jason Syphrett, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at Ekzarh Yossif Foreign Language High School in Lovech has done an amazing job as the successor of ETA Claire Sagstuen, one the founders of the BEST (Bulgarian English Speech Tournament) Foundation – three of his students won this year's U.S.

Qualifier Tournament in Blagoevgrad and will be representing Bulgaria at the international speech and debate tournament in Dallas, Texas, this summer. Congratulations to the winners, Maya Todorova, Kamelia Gazdova and Preslav Vuchev, to their teacher, and the BEST Foundation!

## Fulbright ETA Alumna Kelly Zug Offers a Free Workshop at Sofia City Library's American Corner



D.C. based non profit organization. GlobalGiving works as an online fundraising platform for nonprofits around the world, reaching out to charitable organizations to offer training in online fundraising and connect them with a world network of individual and corporate donors.

On March 30, 2015, Kelly held a free workshop at Sofia City Library's American Corner, focusing on the fundamentals of online fundraising and using GlobalGiving as a platform. The workshop participants discussed relevant topics such as examining and expanding their donor network, donor engagement and strategizing a fundraising plan. Over thirty representatives of Bulgarian NGOs and not-for-profit organizations as well as independent social entrepreneurs attended the workshop.

Other countries on Kelly's six-month field trip itinerary are Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, Kosovo, Hungary, Slovakia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of course, she couldn't wait to re-unite with her students, colleagues and friends in the town of Vratsa, which she still calls home!

**K**elly, who was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at the Ioan Ekzarh Foreign Language High School in Vratsa in AY2013-14, is currently the regional in-the-field representative in Eastern and Central Europe for GlobalGiving, a Washington

## Fulbright ETA Michael Pelehach Conducts a Skype Session with Students at Kernersville's Sedge Garden Elementary

### MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING Michael Pelehach

**"T**o enhance mutual understanding." This is the portion of the Fulbright mission statement I constantly think back to as I attempt to fulfill the organization's ambitious goal of promoting international good will.

My quest to live up to Senator Fulbright's vision has taken many forms: I've infused my lessons with important global issues like immigration and the alarming rise of the Islamic State; I engaged my community by judging local spelling bee competitions and volunteering at an



*Michael Pelehach, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant at "Peyo Yavorov" Foreign Language School in Silistra, Bulgaria*

under-staffed and under-resourced elementary school; I partnered with BEST (Bulgarian English Speech and Debate Tournaments) to start a new speech and debate team at my school; and more recently, I've challenged the status quo by leading students through an aggressive \$25,000 fundraising campaign to build a school.

Recently, I had the opportunity to fulfill this obligation in a unique and exciting way. A former neighbor and family friend, Elizabeth Noell, teaches kindergarten in Jamestown, North Carolina. A couple of months ago, she sent me an e-mail hoping I might be willing to have a Skype call with her class. Knowing the importance of cross-cultural exchange, Elizabeth tries to instill a fascination of other countries in her students, and I applaud her for that!

After giving a brief introduction at the beginning of the call, I was asked a number of questions ranging from "What foods do you eat in Bulgaria?" to "What do you miss most about North Carolina?" My Mom and sister Emily had joined for the conversation in answer to the latter question, I had fun joking with the students that the thing I missed most about North Carolina was BBQ!

Students were eager to ask questions and learn about Bulgaria! During the next 30 minutes, I shared many things I hoped the students would find interesting.

- How to spell Bulgaria – I gave the students the opportunity to try first; hilarity ensued (B-U-L-I-G-E-I-R-E-A).
- Where Bulgaria is located on a map – I was pleased they knew it was in Europe, because some of the adults I spoke to before leaving hadn't managed to get that far.



- The approximate population in Bulgaria – Initial guesses from the students anchored around 25,000, so there was an element of surprise when I told them it was closer to 7 million!
- Popular dishes in Bulgaria – I hadn't eaten lunch yet, and I'm hopeful my growling stomach didn't come through on the Skype call as I described *shopska salad*, *sarmi*, and *banitsa*. I didn't think this was the right audience to tell about *rakia*!
- Common jobs in Bulgaria – I talked about some of the big industries in Bulgaria like sunflowers and rose oils. I also explained that there are many people in Bulgaria who want to work, but don't have the opportunity. It's hard to have an elementary conversation about unemployment, but I think I managed to express that it's indeed a big problem here.
- Technology in the classroom – I gave a dual answer to





a question about what technologies are available at my school. While I wanted to highlight the amazing technology we have at our school thanks to the America for Bulgaria Foundation (smartboards, tablets, laptops, speakers, etc.), I also wanted to emphasize that many schools are alarmingly under-resourced. I challenged the students to think about how their learning experience would be much more challenging without technology, and shared that as the reality for many Bulgarian students.

- What my students are like – I liked this question because it gave me the opportunity to brag about my AMAZING kids. The kindergarteners and third graders were impressed when I told them that most of my students know three or four different languages and are exceptionally bright and creative.



The students' enthusiasm and curiosity was so infectious that I was legitimately sad when the session came to an end. After the interview, it dawned on me that there aren't many better ways to fulfill the Fulbright mission to "enhance mutual understanding" than by instilling a genuine curiosity about foreign countries, languages, and cultures in a group of young people. Hopefully, something I said planted a seed of interest that will grow into a strong desire to learn about people from other backgrounds all over the world. We need more of that.

## Fulbright ETA Chase Philpot Started Bulgaria's Second Youth Lacrosse Team in Burgas

**A** Lacrosse player himself, Chase Philpot, a Fulbright ETA at Geo Milev English Language School in Burgas, started Bulgaria's second youth Lacrosse team, the *Burgas Titans*. After buying some adequate equipment for his team, Chase trained the Titans to become a fierce (and long awaited!) competitor for the only other youth team in the country – *The Sofia Ninjas*. The two teams have already had a couple of successful matches. Chase is also staying in Bulgaria for one more school year, which will give him the opportunity to strengthen his team as well as interest in this ancient Native American sport.



Photo: Nikolay Dimitrov

*To Chicago and Back*

## The Snowy Road to Broccoli

**Lilyana Marinova**

Ph.D. Candidate, Finance

University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria

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

AY 2013-14

**F**or a person who enjoys healthy food and is not picky at all when eating practically anything, my intolerance to broccoli usually surprised people until last year. When I was accepted as a Fulbright scholar, I was expecting to gain in the United States a lot of good memories and a few kilos extra weight due to the consumption of junk food. Well, I was partially right. I did come back with lots of happy memories and an exceptional experience of a new culture, environment and education system. But no extra pounds. Little did I expect that my first dinner in the States would be a totally vegan meal (if we don't count the McDonald's burgers at the airport). My Fulbright program included two stops – for the first three months I was conducting my research at the University of Michigan located in Ann Arbor, and for the next six months – at Stony Brook University in New York. Initially I was scared by the thought that I would have to spend the coldest three months of the coldest year for the last half century in one of the coldest states in America. However, the piles of snow and waves of cold in Ann Arbor were easier to bear as my husband and I were in the house of an elderly vegan couple with very warm hearts and a taste for a healthy lifestyle. It was there that I tried broccoli for the first time since a child. I still don't know if it was the recipe or the extra pinch of love used while preparing our meals together, but since then broccoli is one of my new favorite foods.



From an academic perspective, experiencing the atmosphere in American universities was invaluable. Seeing the interactive courses, the friendly professors and the state-of-the-art classrooms was really motivating. Constant activities on the academic field such as participating in weekly research semi-

nars, discussions with professors and networking with other researchers in finance from all over the world were not only extremely useful for re-shaping my research ideas, but also inspiring my vision about what needs to be done in order to improve the overall educational experience in my university at home. Having access to better resources like academic journals, research paper databases and data providers was another prerequisite for conducting successful research. And what is more, the willingness of people to help you with whatever you need was also striking.

Since we arrived in late fall, my husband and I were lucky to be able to experience all four seasons in the States. Not that I really appreciated this fact during the coldest days of December or January, when the whole Ann Arbor was buried in snow and

all living creatures were practically hibernating in their cozy dens. But this was also the time of the most awaited holidays in the year: carving pumpkins for Halloween, sharing Thanksgiving dinner and decorating an enormous Christmas tree were an essential part of the charm of the American lifestyle and traditions. Of course, the Bulgarian traditions were not forgotten either – our vegan family was very happy to learn that the traditional Bulgarian Christmas Eve dinner consists only of vegan meals and our hostess was delighted when she found the coin in her piece of Christmas bread!

Since it is a university town, cultural activities of any type were abundant in Ann Arbor. We visited several plays (a comedy by Shakespeare and a Broadway drama), a whirling dervishes show, an art fair, an indoor golf facility and many other local events. The pubs and restaurants also vary and can satisfy any taste. But the most important thing are the people. Always friendly and smiling, willing to make friends with strangers, asking questions and expressing genuine interest in other cultures, enthusiastic about American football and politics, appreciating a good conversation and a good meal, the local people are the real treasure. We made friends for a lifetime whom we still keep in touch with.

Moving to New York was connected with some challenges, but also with changing seasons and discovering new horizons. Although finding an affordable place to live on Long Island was a bit of a challenge, we were lucky to have a new home, hosted by a very warm and energetic lady and two of the cutest dogs in the world as housemates. The spring came with the gentle scent of blossoming trees combined with the tempting smell of garden barbecues. We celebrated Passover and Easter together, visited the local markets and lots of museums. If you like going to museums, New York City and Long Island are the perfect place for this. From the extravagance of the Museum of Mod-



ern Art and the glamorous fame of Madame Tussaud's to the majestic serenity of the airplanes in the Museum of Aviation on Long Island, from the always-alive Wall Street to the aquariums and local fairs on Long Island, from big Central Park to the small quiet parks and beach streets near the ocean, we were always full of new and unforgettable experiences.

Of course, one can not go to New York and miss visiting the symbol of the United States – the Statue of Liberty. Just be careful when picking a day to visit it. Out of all hot summer days, picking exactly July 4 for a tour to Liberty Island and Ellis Island might turn out to be more of an international networking experience than a quiet observation, but on the other hand there is no better day to feel the American spirit. This feeling can only be compared to the view from the top of the Empire State Building, from where the skyscrapers look tiny and the sunset looks huge. This sense of relateness helps you remember what you can achieve but also what are the really important things in life, which we sometimes tend to forget when looking from our standpoint.

We also visited some other places like Detroit, New Jersey, Boston and Chicago. But most important of all are the friends that we made and who shaped and broadened our experience. To them I devote the following haiku poem.

Through the snowflakes  
we found an arbor –  
a blissful peace of mind.

We fell into the open arms  
of friends whose loving hearts  
are bigger than the snow outside.

The snow will maybe melt away –  
the snowman leave his shovel,  
but shared smiles we'll take away.

**Disclaimer:** The text is published in its original version.



*Out of America*

## EU and NATO Seminar

February 1-5, 2015

**Claire Manning**

Fulbright English Teaching Assistant

Zaharii Stoyanov English Language School, Sliven, Bulgaria

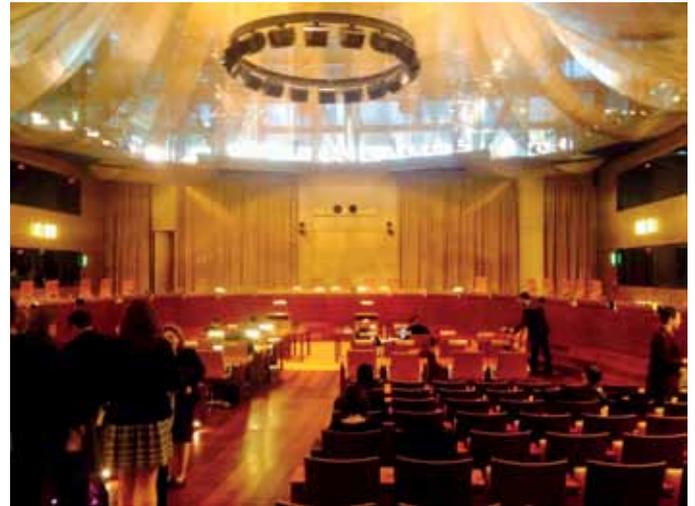
AY 2014-15

Every year the Fulbright Commission in Belgium and Luxembourg hosts a seminar on the EU and NATO for U.S. Fulbright grantees from across Europe and this year I was lucky enough to be among them. The seminar is designed to inform participants about the basic structure and function of



European institutions, but it also afforded those who were currently researching such institutions the opportunity to engage with high-level people to get the answers they have spent the past six months searching for. While I definitely fell into the group of people trying to get a general understanding of these organizations, the question-and-answer sessions with my colleagues from around the continent proved to be as informative and entertaining as the presentations themselves.





After a brief walking tour of Brussels, the program began with a traditional Belgian meal and an “Introduction to the EU” lecture from Jerome Sheridan, a professor at American University. This set the stage nicely for Monday, when we visited not only NATO, but also the U.S. Mission to the European Union. At NATO we were briefed on NATO’s current priorities, as well as the situation between Russia and Ukraine. At the U.S. Mission to the EU we heard an overview of U.S. – EU relations, but perhaps the most interesting part was when Fulbright Schuman Grantees Melissa Powers and Scott Titshaw shared their research on renewable energy in Spain and Denmark and “Fam-migration” law for LGBT families in the U.S. and EU respectively. The day concluded with a lovely reception and meeting with Anthony Gardner, U.S. Ambassador to the EU.

On Tuesday, after more briefings at the European Commission, we departed for Bruges. There we attended a lecture on U.S. – EU Security Relations given by Mark Sheetz, a professor at the College of Europe in Bruges. Afterwards, we braved the cold to do some sightseeing in this charming medieval town.

Bright and early Wednesday morning, we packed up and left for Luxembourg. First on the agenda was the European Court of Justice, where we attended a briefing of a case by ECJ Vice President Koen Lenaerts, before actually hearing the case C-231 /14InnoLux/ Commission, which involved fines on a technology company with factories in China and Taiwan. After a delicious lunch, we went on a walking tour of Luxembourg City with Chris Miller, a Fulbright alumnus from Luxembourg who had spent the past year studying at Columbia. Later that evening we were given a briefing by the U.S.

Embassy in Luxembourg before attending a reception hosted by the U.S. Ambassador to Luxembourg.

As my whirlwind tour of Europe’s capital drew to a close, it became clear that the friendships I had formed with the other participants had become just as important and informative as the rest of the program. I heard about neurological research in Portugal and radio journalism in Berlin. I compared the current state of things in our respective countries with the one Fulbright present from Romania, which joined the EU in 2007 along with Bulgaria, and I had to explain to many more people that Bulgaria is indeed part of the European Union. It was a fascinating opportunity for all of us to learn more not only about these European institutions, but also the countries themselves, and I was very honored to have the chance to represent Bulgaria.



## The Fulbright Berlin Seminar

March 15 – 19, 2015

**Rada Kaneva**

Program Officer

Bulgarian – American Fulbright Commission



Every year, the German Fulbright Commission organizes a mid-year seminar enabling their grantees to get together, share experiences, and discuss the achievements and challenges of the past semester. They invite US grantees and staff members from other European countries to take part in this event together with all US grantees currently in Germany, German grantees-to-be, and Fulbright alumni. I had the pleasure of attending the 61<sup>st</sup> Berlin Seminar with an excellent group of US grantees in Bulgaria – one Fulbright Graduate Student, Julian Chehirian, and five Fulbright English Teaching Assistants – Bobbi Arduini, Anna Fuselier, Michael Pelehach, Asher Dvir-Djerassi, and Chase Philpot. The total number of US participants was 313, and around 200 German grantees joined them for some of the sessions in the program.

Before the official opening of the event, the German Commission generously offered the participants several options for guided tours to introduce them to the vibrant and diverse city of Berlin. The tour I joined was led by professional guide who gave us very interesting facts from the history of both East and

West Berlin, and allowed us to get off the bus and enjoy the graffiti painted on the longest remaining part of the Berlin wall. My colleagues joined the other tours that were focused on the history of the Cold War and the ethnic and cultural diversity of the city residents.





The welcome dinner in the evening gave the first opportunity for grantees to meet each other, exchange information about their work, and enjoy a glass of wine in an informal environment. The starting panel on the next day gave the participants the chance to discuss topics that have been introduced, formulated and also moderated by US grantees. The workshop topics were announced before the Seminar, and everyone was given the opportunity to choose a topic that best fits his/her interests (*Immigration and Integration; Environmentalism/Environmental Consciousness; (Performing) Arts in Europe; Gender Issues; EU Education System; Relationship between U.S. and Europe; Media and the Challenges of Digital Media; Return of the Cold War Era; (Universal) Health Care* and those who didn't feel any of these topics close to their hearts joined a special "Wild Card"/Joker workshop where they could decide on the spot what to discuss). Most of the workshops were moderated by US graduate students in Germany, but there were also grantees from Luxembourg, Belgium, Hungary, and a scholar from Romania. Each group had to choose a reporter and a secretary responsible for presenting the results from the discussion verbally and in writing for publication purposes. After the discussion, we got together to hear the reporters from all groups, as each of them was given 10 minutes to summarize the conclusions. Presenter for the Wild Card/Joker group was US grantee to Bulgaria Julian Chehirian.

A workshop for Fulbright Senior Scholars, moderated by two current grantees and the head of the American Program at the German Commission, Reiner Rohr, was held in the afternoon. Most of the professors attending the workshop were currently working in Germany, but there were also grantees from Poland, Romania, Turkey, Finland, and the UK. All of them agreed that it is becoming difficult for scholars to find time to teach abroad for a semester, but that they are glad they made the effort as their experience is very rewarding.

The official Opening Ceremony took place on Monday, March 16, at the concert hall of the University of the Arts (*Universität der Künste*). Greeting addresses were made by Dr. Rolf Hoffman, Executive Director of the German-American Fulbright Commission, Thomas Miller, Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy and Chair of the Bi-national Board of the German-American Fulbright Commission, and Dr. Benedikt Haller, Minister at Large, Directorate-General for Culture and Communication at the Federal Foreign Office of the Republic of Germany. The keynote speech was delivered by Cem Özdemir, national chairman of the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and member of the German Bundestag. A quick look at his biography revealed that he studied social pedagogy and worked as an educator before becoming the first person of Turkish descent ever elected to the country's federal parliament in 1994. From 1998 until 2002, he was the Green Party's Parliamentary Spokesman on Domestic Affairs and advocated for reforms to Germany's citizenship laws. From 2004 until 2009, Özdemir was a Member of the European Parliament in the parliamentary group The Greens/





European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA). He has also worked in Washington, D.C. and Brussels as a Transatlantic Fellow through the German Marshall Fund. As an experienced politician, captivating lecturer and fluent English speaker, he was loudly applauded for his speech on "Tackling the Challenge of our Time: The Multiplicity of Conflicts and Need for a Reformed Global Order". The evening concluded with musical performances by American Fulbright grantees: Lisa Romain, Violin; Jade Conlee and Joseph Nykiel, Piano; and the dance of Fulbright student Stephanie Miracle, currently researching the rich lineage of German Tanztheater at Folkwang University in Essen. The concert was followed by a reception.

The morning session of the second day of the conference was moderated by David Patrician, a free-lance journalist and Fulbright alumnus, and was held in the Berlin City Hall (*Rotes Rathaus*). The purpose of the *European Dimensions Panel* was to give US grantees in Germany a brief overview on what their colleagues in other European countries are experiencing. This year, we had the privilege to be included in the representative panel, and we nominated ETA Michael Pelehach as the designated speaker for Bulgaria. Michael made a brilliant presentation, touching upon the country's history, tradition, lan-

guage, cuisine, his town, school, and new Bulgarian friends. Many people came to us afterwards to congratulate him and showed genuine interest in his work and in the country. The other presentations were also very interesting, revealing both the unique and the universal experience of grantees in Finland, Andorra, Poland, Turkey, and Spain. The panel was followed by a welcome speech by Mark Rackles, State Secretary for Education at the local Berlin Government. He spoke about the achievements and challenges for Berlin in terms of education, free spaces, construction, rents and housing, and responded to many questions mainly related to inclusion of immigrants and children with disabilities in the educational system, and to the question of the day – why German Olympic officials have selected Hamburg over Berlin to bid for the 2024 Olympics.

The concluding day of the Seminar offered two workshops in the morning – one for ETAs, and one for Graduate Students. The Graduate Students workshop moderators divided participants into three groups that had to discuss the past (how has the past shaped their lives as Fulbrighters), future (how Fulbrighters and people around them are working towards a better future) and past and future tensions. Before the end of the morning session, group reporters from each of the three panels presented a summary of the discussion in their respective group.

The final presentations in the afternoon introduced the projects of 11 selected students, scholars and ETAs. Topics varied from using chemistry to analyze Edvard Munch's painting pigments, history of 15<sup>th</sup> century Lübeck, and using the European sports club system in America to mimicking duck feet for designing legionella control systems, revolutionizing how we measure the ages of the stars and using deep sea paleontology to draw a map for global climate changes. It was a very enjoyable session, which re-confirmed the power of the Fulbright Program to support individual people – the most promising,





extended to the evening, when a farewell party took place at a night club called *Gretchen*. The active participation of so many grantees proved that the Fulbright Program is not only a grand idea, but that it prospers and expands through all committed participants.

The Berlin Seminar offers an invaluable opportunity to many participants in the Fulbright Program, as it brings together US scholars, students, and ETAs from Germany with their colleagues in Europe, and helps German grantees to establish a network with their American counterparts. It serves as a great and powerful tool for exchanging ideas, sharing experience, resolving problems and creating a network of professional and personal ties. It also gives everybody the sense of belonging to a greater Community and increases the motivation of all participating sides. Special recognition and gratitude is due to the German Fulbright Commission for organizing such amazing event, and to the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission for supporting our participation. Thank you!

and brightest students and scholars, who have always been the defining factor in forging life-long networks and cross-cultural ties. Questions and answers related to the presentations started in the hall, continued over coffee in the hotel lobby, and even



## Our Pasts in the Practice of our Present

**Julian Chehrian**

U.S. Fulbright graduate student in social history/psychology

Host institution: New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria

AY 2014-15

**A**t the 2015 Berlin Fulbright Seminar, a workshop for researchers split off into three groups—past, present, and future. Our goal was to discuss how individuals and communities in the European Union interact with their past, with their shared present and their conceivable futures. I was fortunate to be placed in the group on the past, a theme that has given form to both my work on the recent social history of psychotherapy in Bulgaria and my personal experiences as a Bulgarian raised abroad.

It is sometimes said that young people in Bulgaria do not have much of a concept of life in the previous regime. This is interpreted by some as a sign of necessary and positive change. 'A welcome shift in consciousness'. Others experience this lapse in awareness of recent history as a point of weakness and vulnerability to social and political forces maintaining connections with the recent past.

I imagine that it is personally and politically necessary to reject the past in order to assert a new framework of personal, social and political life. It would be risky, however, to neglect layers—roots, models and structuring characteristics—that lie just beneath fresh soil.

How is it that we engage with the past? What are the consequences of different ways of practicing this for the ways in which we carry and constitute ourselves in the present? For the ways in which we position ourselves towards the future? My days in Berlin have given me new perspectives on this—from the parameter of individual or interpersonal life to complex networks of community. Throughout the spectrum, it is fascinating to observe how we negotiate with the past.

A biologist in our discussion group shared some of his studies of agricultural practices in Bavaria. It has taken contemporary scientists decades of work, he says, to explain farmers' age-old practice of predicting harvest conditions based on the state of soil-thaw in the late-winter. In this case, efforts are

being made in the present to improve our understanding of successful methodologies long in use.

Another scholar gave us an example of the present breaking with the past. Studying professional associations of surgeons in Northern Europe, he has traced the transition from a classical master-apprentice model to a standardized, entry-by-exam driver's-license system. The result has been controversy and friction in a professional community that has had to adapt to an entirely new system.

A researcher working in the archives of the philosopher Husserl at the University of Freiburg gave us an interesting perspective on how a dedicated community of specialists interacts with "the master's work". Only a few people in the world know how to read Husserl's shorthand. One cannot take pictures in the archives (if a copy of a document is needed, it must be reproduced by hand). Strict order and ritualism governs Husserl scholars' conduct. And yet, with the change of generations, new leaders within the community are looking to change the ways in which things can or can't be done.

A scholar of Yiddish language and Jewish identity contributed a perspective on how there is no consistent position within the scholarly community on whether the language can (or needs to be) preserved.

I shared my insight into the disappearance and re-introduction of psychosomatic medicine in Bulgarian psychiatric theory and clinical practice, and the consequences that this had for individual's experience of their illness—for their ability to recover.

During my five days in Berlin I met a number of individuals' whose personal past seemed to present similar questions and conflicts for the way that they engage with the present and position themselves towards the future.

One fellow participant, a practitioner of art therapy, reasoned that she could trace her interest in her profession to her at-

tempts to help her mother navigate a deep and difficult depression after the loss of her spouse. Another, a Romanian photographer who grew up abroad, is working on a film about hyper-realistic silicone baby “practice dolls”. The film is a commentary on the traumatic loss of unborn children and the social knowledge and practices that inform the experience of motherhood even prior to birth. An English Teaching Assistant in Germany shared the story of his decision to leave a university when he was younger. The experiences that he had in the years between his departure and his resumption of study—including a series of extended bicycle trips in the U.S.—form a defining and orienting context for his present life. I met a person my age—a musician who moved to Berlin to be with another person. They wore a pouch around their neck (inside was an object they had received as a gift from their partner). In the wake of the crumbling relationship, we sat together and had a drink in front of quiet boulevard at night time. In this time of change, and in his recognition of the burden of the pouch around his neck, they made the decision to remove the pouch.

In my own practices as an individual living in Sofia—a landscape charged with many emotions and memories from personal and family experiences—I navigate the past and define myself in relation to it. Apperception is a “mental process by which a person makes sense of an idea by assimilating it into

the body of ideas he or she already possesses.” I see and experience how others do this too. I observe the changing ideas and practices of psychiatric professionals. I observe with excitement the renaissance that psychotherapy is experiencing in Bulgaria following its re-emergence as a form of treatment. I also experience how my generation in Bulgaria is leaving its’ own imprint on the city through the assertion of new perspectives, new gathering spaces, and new modes of community and subjectivity.

I believe that by studying the spectrum between individual consciousnesses and larger entities—communities and political organizations, we can achieve understandings of how the past informs our ideas and practices in the present. To deny the past is to be blind to its’ participation in the present. But to deny that the present can spawn yet unseen forms of social and political life is similarly blinding.

It was a privilege to join hundreds of current and future Fulbrighters in an engaging context and environment at the 2015 Berlin Fulbright Seminar. Since returning from the conference I have continued to correspond with individuals who I am lucky to have met.

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

## “In Bulgaria WE live like Kings”

**Asher Dvir-Djerassi**

Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, "Tsar Simeon Veliki" Secondary School,  
Vidin, Bulgaria

AY 2014-15

“In Bulgaria WE live like Kings.” This was the rallying cry of our time in Berlin. Although not mandated of us at the time of departure from our corner of Eastern Europe to the old Cold-War crossroads between East and West, we came to act as more than representative of Bulgaria’s Fulbright program, we came to act as advocates of our program and of Bulgaria.

From dinner and conference discussions, to Michael’s brilliant presentation on Bulgaria, and, of course, to our time out with hundreds of other Fulbright teachers and scholars from

throughout Europe, we sold Bulgaria. But our advertisement of Bulgaria and our role inside of the country was not hyperbolic. Rather, we genuinely sparked and catered to a fascination with Bulgaria by telling the unmitigated truth.

My experience in Berlin gave me a sense of perspective on how important, interesting, and engaging our work is here. Contrasting my experience with the experiences of other European Fulbrights showed me, first and foremost, that our work in Bulgaria is important and, more so than ever, I believe it is an excellent investment.

The German ETAs, for example, usually work no more than 12 hours a week and have a minimal role in the classroom. Not only does the Fulbright program in Germany fail to utilize these teachers, they have little structure to make an impact. But this is not surprising. Before the fact, it seems quite clear that German ETAs have a less significant role in that country than Bulgaria, for instance. Germany is an advanced, developed country that has a significant amount of American tourists, in addition to other nationalities. The exposure they receive have to one additional American has little consequence.

Lastly, the German ETAs are paid a mere 1000 Euros a month with the obligation to find and pay for their own housing. Why do I make a point to address the financial resources these ETAs? If the Bulgarian Fulbright is interested in attracting more ETA applicants it seems like a very smart move to advertise the relative better financial situation ETAs in Bulgaria enjoy versus other countries. This would be in addition to telling of the impact that ETAs in this country can and do have.

Besides the conference and the Fulbrights from other countries that I met, the city of Berlin gave me a nuanced perspective. Setting down in Berlin after travelling from Vidin, through the backwoods of Romania to the Bucharest Airport is something of a shock. Berlin is a model city that brilliantly blends its roots with a contemporary, ecologically friendly city. A city that is a stark contrast to the small villages of Romania I travelled through in a minibus, where horse drawn wagons seemed more common than cars or busses.

When the gang of Fulbrighters got together we acted like starry eyed immigrants arriving to New York's shores in the early 20th century. We gazed up in amazement at the buildings - beautifully and uniformly painted; marveled at the

cleanly paved streets, that were without a single pot hole or missing cobblestone. This strange spectacle - five Americans being more amazed at the cleanliness and orderliness of streets than the Holocaust memorial or the Brandenburg Gate- began as a joke but contained an honest element.

Coming from Bulgaria, particularly from outside the major cities, Berlin at first glance seems like a mirage. However, after one is acclimated to uniformly painted facades, for instance, the dream like feeling begins to fade away. And just as I became acclimated to Berlin, I have become acclimated to Bulgaria.

Travelling through Bulgaria with my mom for the last two weeks reminds me of the initial perspectives and impulses we, the ETAs, all felt, albeit in varying degrees. The sight of the block houses comes as a shock to most foreigners, even those who are familiar with other areas of Eastern Europe. The patchwork of gray, white, yellow, stained concrete, etc. is a foreign taste to most palates. And in line with this and the American spirit to endlessly critique and propose solutions to problems, just like me, my mom would not suspend her rants on proposing solutions to end Bulgaria's aesthetic problems.

But after spending some much time here many of the things she saw as problems I saw as part of the landscape. This difference in what my mom and I see when wandering through Vidin tells me a lot as to why my Bulgarian students were often offended when I asked them about what I saw as major issues of public policy. That is not to say that the questions I have asked my students to consider are incorrect or should not have been asked. But this experience did give me a better understanding of my student's perspective.

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## Anna Fuselier

Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, "Petar Bogdan" Foreign English Language School,  
Montana, Bulgaria  
AY 2014-15

**D**uring the month of March, I was fortunate enough to be able to join four other Bulgaria ETAs for the 2015 Fulbright Berlin Conference. One of the things I enjoyed the most about the conference was the wide variety of both the topics we discussed and the individuals we were able to interact with – ETAs, researchers, and scholars from all over

Europe. Since it is difficult to cover all these topics in the detail they deserve in a brief summary report, I will be focusing on what I felt was one of the most interesting and often surprising elements of these discussions: the wide variety of experiences between ETAs in the European Union, particularly in terms of the challenges faced at both a cultural and professional level.

It certainly did not come as a shock that there were differences in experiences between ETAs in western European countries and my experience in Bulgaria. Yet I was still continuously surprised by the vast differences in challenges highlighted by my peers in other countries, and they by mine. During one workshop focused on dealing with serious issues in the classroom, I worked with German and Spanish ETAs to prepare a video giving advice on the topic to future ETAs in the European Union. We often found ourselves at an impasse when trying to decide which issues were most important to cover.

For example, in Germany, ETAs often confronted intense bullying, self harm issues, and students “cracking” under the pressure of being placed in a prestigious school. ETAs in Spain more frequently found themselves dealing with sexual harassment and body image issues. When I shared stories regarding depression, hopelessness, and aggression issues among my students, they were often met with wide eyed stares from the other ETAs. We often found ourselves trying to solve each others problems with techniques that had proved effective within our own communities and educational infrastructure. This often proved useless, and highlighted the uniqueness of not only placements between countries, but within them. Despite these disparities, we agreed that for ETAs everywhere, it is important to know when to pick your battles and recognize the limits of your influence, both within and outside of the classroom, and highlighted how this can actually work in your favor.

Personal challenges varied as well: a Spanish ETA told me her biggest challenge had been “trying to make sure Fulbright did not turn into Study Abroad round two” and forcing herself to integrate into the local culture and community. German ETAs often expressed that they feel superfluous or unneeded in their communities, and struggle to create a role for themselves to make their time meaningful. Conversely, my best experi-

ences have involved feeling a true and necessary part of the community, while I have found my greatest challenges to be simply making friends my own age, feeling isolated, and sometimes being relied on by students and colleagues too much for my own good.

Perhaps the most unexpected variance in ETA experiences was the innate difference between the Fulbright ETA culture in Bulgaria as opposed to the culture in other country’s ETA communities. It became clear early on in the week that Fulbright Bulgaria had attracted a different type of personality than western European countries. We discussed this with German ETAs, who comically suggested the Bulgaria ETAs were a bit “edgier” than the German ETAs, and that this was a reflection of what we had been seeking when we came to the Fulbright experience. Many of the German ETAs expressed that they had been looking for a gap year or to gain some basic teaching experience, while the Bulgaria ETAs were often looking for something unique, or a challenge, or just something they had never experienced before.

While each of these individual differences were enlightening in themselves, it created a larger picture for me of the way Bulgaria fits into the community of the European Union. Bulgaria is a new European Union member, and perhaps a country still struggling to discover how it fits into this community. I believe the experiences and challenges of ETAs in Bulgaria reflect both the traits of Bulgaria as a country as well as this transition. For this reason, I felt proud to represent Bulgaria in the European Union community at the conference. I returned home to Bulgaria with a new and unique perspective, and I hope that future ETAs gain as much from this shared experience as I did.

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## Diversity

**Barbara Arduini**

Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, ELS "Plovdiv",  
Plovdiv, Bulgaria  
AY 2014-15

The Berlin Seminar was an excellent way to more deeply understand the diversity within the Fulbright program, both through exchanging personal experiences with other grantees and well as through witnessing the broad spectrum of skill sets that individuals brought to their respective positions. I went into the Seminar in hopes of networking with other Fulbright recipients, especially as a means to understand the role of ETAs in other countries within the EU and to share the many successes of the Bulgarian program. These hopes were more than achieved, and my attendance at this event richened my perspective on both the vital role that Fulbright plays in intercultural communication as well as my own passion for teaching and learning.

To begin with, I believe that the attendance of seven Bulgarian Fulbright representatives added to the diversity of the Seminar. Many of the other EU grantees possessed only cursory knowledge of Bulgaria's unique culture and history, and were excited to learn about our ETA experiences. Especially after Michael Pelahach's wonderful presentation, many people approached me and my colleagues with questions about the food, the culture, the classroom, the governmental transition, and so on. I feel it safe to say that grantees from other countries left the Seminar with a new understanding of and appreciation for Bulgaria.

In order to deepen the experience of intercultural communication, I took part in two different panels that focused specifically on diversity, especially as related to minorities. Both of these panels were thought-provoking, though they were presented quite differently. The first panel was a larger group that included individuals from various professional fields and recipients of different types of grants. Our dialogue centered on immigrant experience. Interestingly, one common theme that arose from the panel's activities was that almost everyone feels the media does not accurately or

positively represent their ethnicity or nationality. (The only exception to this was a researcher from Finland who felt the news portrayed his people well.) Another discussion topic of this panel that I found particularly compelling was that the motives for immigration play a major role in how people adjust to their new settings. For instance, many of us had elected to leave our home countries, which gave us a different sense of empowerment than those who had fled their homes as refugees.

The second panel that I attended was specifically for ETAs, but it addressed the topic of diversity from many different angles. In a small group of about ten, each of us discussed how diversity factored into our teaching experiences. It was fascinating to hear about the different ways in which ETAs dealt with human rights related issues in their classrooms. The German ETAs explained, for example, that there is such a strong emphasis engrained into the citizenry about the horrors of the Holocaust that no student would dare to doodle a swastika on their papers. However, sometimes translation of language itself led to politically incorrect speech; several German ETAs noted the use of the terms "Afro-American" and "colored people" as examples of this. The two ETAs from France both expressed challenges with students using racist language and thinking that there was no harm in doing so. One ETA, a deaf woman who taught sign language at a school in Germany, spoke at length about the pros and cons of segregating students with disabilities. I shared about my experiences volunteering with Roma youth and talking about this work with my non-Roma students as a way to broaden (if not break) stereotypical views. Still another ETA spoke about her desire to discuss body positivity with her students, especially as she saw some of the young people in her classes struggling with disordered eating.

While each of us came into the panel with different experiences of diversity in the classroom, the group reached con-

sensus around a few issues relating to our concerns. One, it seems clear that the best way to teach is through example, and that as cultural ambassadors it is essential that we embody the tolerance we hope to transmit to our students. In that light, it is of key importance that we truly listen to our students and engage them in critical discourse on these important issues. Next, we should encourage students to listen to and learn from a variety of human experiences – exposing them to literature, music, art, and films that they may be unfamiliar with. Doing so gives students a window into other people’s lives, and helps to combat two-dimen-

sional depictions so prevalent in the media. Finally, we should strive to offer students opportunities to share honestly with each other about their own experiences of “otherness” in whatever contexts they may have felt it. Ideally, the classroom would be a safe enough place for students to see that most people have felt like the “other” at one point or another, for this is the bedrock upon which compassion and tolerance are built.

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## Chase Philpot Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, "Geo Milev" English Language School, Bourgas, Bulgaria AY 2014-15

In mid-March I had the honor to represent Fulbright Bulgaria at Fulbright’s 61st Berlin seminar. The conference provided the perfect opportunity to meet, get to know, and network with American Fulbrighters teaching and studying in 25 neighboring European countries as well as 200 German Fulbrighters preparing for their year-to-come in the United States. Unfortunately, we had very limited time to interact with the German Fulbrighters, however, the Starting Panel titled “One Continent... Many Visions” provided the perfect opportunity to do so and left me with strong impressions of the German Fulbrighters.

Asher, Michael, Rada and I all participated in the same panel titled “Return of the Cold War Era?” The panel was an open discussion moderated by Michelle Cerna, an American Fulbrighter working in Germany whose Czech family history was strongly influenced by Soviet involvement in the region. Despite there being more than 50 people sitting in chairs all facing the same direction, a very productive discussion unfolded with probably 20 or so participants contributing to the debate. We first contrasted varying definitions of the Cold War in hopes of centering our discussion upon a commonly accepted definition. “East v. West,” “Communism v. Capitalism,” or simply “Competing Spheres of Influence” were the larger dichotomies debated. Naturally, the current conflict in Ukraine came up.

This led to further discussion on whether or not the United States and NATO should send lethal aid to Ukraine, on the effectiveness of sanctions in recent history, and on sanctions against Russia. I was impressed by the fact that many of the German and American Fulbrighters there had experience studying Russian history, culture, and language. Very few Americans study anything Russian so it was very refreshing to be in a room with so many well-informed and knowledgeable students of Eastern European subjects. The general consensus in the room suggested the futility of sanctions against the Russian government; that anything the West attempted to impose only offered ammunition for the Russian government to spin the conflict as one of Western aggression. This, in turn, fuels the fire of nationalist sentiment of which Putin has proved himself so adept at taking full advantage. This only serves to agitate the Ukrainian conflict. Sanctions against Saddam’s Iraq and sanctions against Iran today were used as a basis of comparison. Despite the general agreement, no one could answer the following question: If sanctions do not work, what alternative is there?

I added to the discussion my personal experience living in Russia, studying Russian, and I tried to describe (to the best of my ability with limited time) Bulgaria’s complicated relationship with Russia. This discussion panel was important because, as evidenced by many successful and influential Fulbright alumni,

many of today's Fulbrighters will take leadership positions in their respective countries. Some of these young scholars will eventually find themselves in position to enact policy decisions that will shape geopolitical relations. It was encouraging to see from what perspectives the scholars approached the debate i.e. not one of black and white (Russia is the enemy).

On Tuesday Michael and I attended the Fulbright Alumni Workshop titled "Entrepreneurs in a Borderless World." Despite the workshop's name and intention, very few Fulbright Alumni were in attendance. I can only assume that it was intended to be a discussion opportunity for the entrepreneurial minds of Fulbright's alumni, but due to the circumstances it turned into a question and answering session between the few Fulbright alumni with actual business experience and the current Fulbrighters, like Michael and me, who showed up out of curiosity. Many of the American Fulbrighters from Germany showed up and were eager to gain some perspective on doing business in Germany, how to stay in the Berlin area, and what advantages and disadvantages there are coming in as an American. After brief introductions, we talked in greater depth about some ideas each brought up.

On Wednesday the 18th, the last day before departing, all of the English Teaching Assistants gathered for a workshop. We were then split into about 15 groups most of which were to help in the production of a short promotional video for the Fulbright ETA position. Each group was assigned a specific aspect of the ETA position to talk about i.e. acquiring a visa, how

to save money, what to do in case of medical emergency, how to handle a classroom, and so on. I led the group focused on learning and using the host country's language. Together the group came up with ideas on how to best learn the language (like finding a language partner or private tutor) and how to get involved in the host community. Regarding community involvement, I talked about how I have started a local sports team and that has given me the opportunity to pick up some Bulgarian and get to know members of the community I would never have come into contact with otherwise. I do not know who is in charge of the promotional video or when it comes out, but I'm sure they will use some of what our group put together due to the critical nature of our topic.

Finally, I will include a tidbit from my free time during the weeklong event. After I found out that I would be going to Berlin, I was put in contact with a local lacrosse team coach. He informed me as to where and when they were practicing. On Tuesday night I took the metro out and joined the Berlin Lacrosse Club for a practice. At the end of practice, I told them about the Sofia Lacrosse Tournament that will take place in Bulgaria from July 3rd to 5th and encouraged them to come and join us. The response was favorable. Bulgaria is on the periphery of European Lacrosse and the largest problem is attracting attention to (and participation in) tournaments so, let us hope it pays off!

**Disclaimer:**

*The text is published in its original and unedited version.*

## Michael Pelehach

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AY 2014-15

Recently, I had the pleasure of representing Bulgaria at the 61st annual Berlin Seminar—a weeklong conference that provides Fulbright grantees from all over Europe the opportunity to network and exchange experiences from their teaching or research roles. Interacting with such a diverse group through a variety of panels, small group discussions, and informal conversations was invigorating.

While the week was jam-packed with interesting and informative events, the highlight for me was having the opportunity to share my own personal experiences in Bulgaria at the European Dimensions panel. Representatives from Spain, Turkey, Andorra, Finland, and Poland joined me in giving short presentations to ~250 European ETAs and researchers.

Going into the presentation, my goal was to start with a mix of Bulgarian geography, history, and culture before sharing some of what I've learned both inside and outside the classroom.

To start my speech, I presented the two questions my friends, family members, and co-workers back home had asked me when I first told them I'd be moving to Bulgaria:

1. Why Bulgaria?
2. Are you sure you want to live in South America?

I continued poking fun at Americans' spotty geography by flashing a map of Europe up on the presentation screen and asking the audience to raise their hand if they could confidently come up and identify Bulgaria. I'd guess that about 30% of the audience raised their hands (more than I expected) at which point I highlighted Bulgaria on the map.

I waited until I saw some audience members nodding their heads and bragging to their neighbors, "I knew that," before I let them know that it was actually Romania I had highlighted. I felt a little bad tricking my audience, but it helped prove my point that many Americans have absolutely no idea where Bulgaria is.

The reason I wanted to start with a brief geography lesson was because understanding Bulgaria's position at the crossroads of East and West is fundamentally important to understanding its history and culture. I elaborated on how being part of the Roman Empire, Byzantine Empire, Ottoman Empire, and Eastern Bloc influenced today's Bulgaria, a young democracy combating corruption but proudly maintaining its national identity.

I then switched gears and gave a quick overview of Bulgarian cuisine, industry, holidays, and traditions. It's impossible to cover such a rich and interesting history in just a couple of my slides, but I did my best to hit some of the aspects of Bulgarian culture that had made an impact on me. I especially enjoyed sharing about Baba Marta, a Spring Holiday that was in progress during the time of my presentation.

After giving a brief explanation of the Bulgarian alphabet and language, I focused on some of the lessons I had taught that seemed to really work well with my students. The whole point of the week was to exchange ideas, and I hope some of my lesson topics proved useful to some of my colleagues teaching in other countries.

Finally, I talked about how enriching my life in Bulgaria outside the classroom has been. I gave lots of credit to the founders of BEST (Bulgarian English Speech Tournaments) for the work they've done to create an amazing organization to promote critical thinking and English Language skills. I talked a little about the BEST chapter I had created at my school, but really wanted to focus on the larger impact the organization was having on the country. The audience also seemed amused when I described my peculiar, but meaningful friendship with my 60-year-old neighbor who doesn't speak any English.

Our presentations were followed by a short question and answer session, and I was very pleased with how interested people were in Bulgaria. Many of the questions were directed at me specifically, and I was encouraged by the audience's desire to learn more.

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