Issue 81 | Spring 2016

FULBRIGHT

NEWSLETTER

Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange



Turning the Wheels of Time

Social Entrepreneurship in Bulgaria

Fulbright Bulgaria's 2015-2016 Grantees

Bulgaria: The Balkan Surprise

Fulbright Fiction

FULBRIGHT

Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It's hard to believe that a year has passed since I stepped into former ED Julia Stefanova's shoes and took over leadership of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission. While her shoes may be hard to fill, during her twenty-three years in the position, she left a solid foundation for me to step onto: a fantastic staff, a vibrant alumni community, and a commission with a spotless reputation for excellence and transparency. However, I would like to think that we have not merely rested on Julia's laurels, but have tried to build on her achievements. Over the past year, the commission staff and I have redesigned the Fulbright Bulgaria media presence, giving our website a complete makeover (check out our new look at fulbright.bg), launching a bi-monthly e-newsletter, and reformatting our paper newsletter as a bi-annual missive. We also expanded our social media portfolio to include Instagram and LinkedIn, in addition to our already extant Facebook, YouTube and Twitter profiles. Our changes have not been solely virtual, however, but have extended to our real-world contacts with the Fulbright community. In order to provide our returning Bulgarian grantees with a forum in which to share their experiences, in October 2015 we launched the first annual "Fulbright Open Lectures" to great enthusiasm: in TED-style talks, a dozen recent and not-so-recent Fulbrighters shared their expertise on everything from nanotechnology and soil science to refugees and Chicago blues.

However, the biggest change facing the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission at the present is our impending move to new premises. After twenty-three years at Alexander Stamboliyski 17 in the Ministry of Culture, we will be moving to a new location at 12 Vitosha Boulevard – in the heart of Sofia's pedestrian zone! Thanks to the support of former Minister of Education Todor Tanev and his team, who helped locate this fantastic new space, the Fulbright Commission will occupy the entire fifth floor of an elegant administrative building from 1951. Renovations are now underway – stay tuned for an invitation to our house-warming party in summer! And of course, our alumni and friends from abroad are always welcome to stop by Vitosha 12 and pay us a visit whenever they are in Sofia.

I hope you enjoy this first issue of our redesigned newsletter – you will have the chance to find out what fellow alumni Brian C. Murphy and Boyan Dobrev have been up to, as well as to become acquainted with current grantees. Please don't hesitate to send us your own news at **Fulbright@fulbright.bg** to include in future issues!

Angela Rodel

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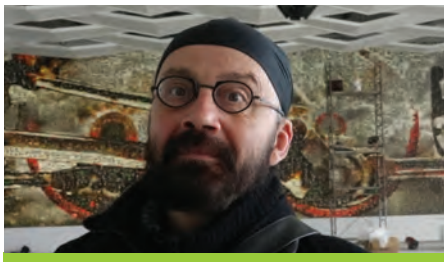

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Outreach Campaign

for the AY 2017-18 Fulbright Grants Competition

by Maria Kostova



Presentation at NBU

For the AY 2017-18 grants competition campaign, the Fulbright Commission planned 21 meetings, presentations, participations in career and academic fairs at Bulgarian higher education institutions, research centers, and non-governmental organizations throughout the country.

The aim was to promote the Fulbright award opportunities to as many Bulgarian citizens interested in academic or professional qualification in the US as possible.

Executive Director Angela Rodel and Program Officer for Bulgarian Grantees Maria Kostova met with the academic leadership teams and presented the awards for graduate studies, research and lecturing in the US to students and faculties at numerous universities and academic institutions.

Stops on the Fulbright promotional tour included the National Defense Academy, Sofia; University of Economics, Varna; Naval Academy, Varna; University of National and World Economy, Sofia; Sofia University (all disciplines); Sofia University - Business School; New Bulgarian University; Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; Technical University, Sofia; Southwestern University, Blagoevgrad; American University in Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad; Trakia University, Stara Zagora; Veliko Turnovo University and University of Rousse.

The Commission took part in the Job Fair National Career Days in Sofia, Rousse and Veliko Turnovo. Presentations were offered for professional and non-governmental organizations such as “Teach for Bulgaria” and the Association of Bulgarian Leaders and Entrepreneurs, as well as at the “Careers in Bulgaria Forum,” which is an annual initiative under the auspices of the Bulgarian President.

Two more events are scheduled by the end of the campaign: a presentation at the Forum for Doctoral Students at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and participation at the Career Days of Technical University in Sofia.

The meetings with academics, students, lecturers, researchers, civil society activists and professionals emphasized the importance of communication and interaction as part of promoting not only strictly academic opportunities in the US, but also the value of educational and cultural exchange.

During the visits this year the interest on the part of scholars and doctoral researchers was more marked, but graduate students also demonstrated focus and determination to make the most of these educational opportunities.

It was a pleasure and an honor to visit the best Bulgarian higher education institutions, meet their dedicated faculty, bright students, and discuss with their leadership plans for co-operation with the Fulbright program, not only in terms of sending Bulgarian representatives to US universities, but also by hosting American lecturers and specialists at Bulgarian institutions.

We are looking forward to the results of these encouraging visits and wish the best of luck to all who participate in the AY 2017-18 Fulbright grants competition!

The Opportunity Funds Activities in Bulgaria

by Snejana Teneva

Fulbright Commission and EducationUSA Launch Opportunity Funds Program in Bulgaria

The EducationUSA Opportunity Funds program assists highly qualified yet economically challenged students who are likely to be awarded full financial aid from U.S. colleges and universities. Opportunity Funds provides financial resources to cover the up-front costs of applying to US universities, such as testing, application fees, or airfare. In addition to their impressive academic achievements, Opportunity Funds students also bring cultural and socio-economic diversity to U.S. campuses.

Bulgaria is one of the few European countries involved in the Opportunity Funds program, joining Belarus, Bosnia, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine. This US State Department-funded program is also available in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. Bulgaria, being the poorest member of the European Union, has many highly talented students who are deterred from applying to US universities due to cost. To encourage these bright youngsters to consider the US as their educational destination, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission's EducationUSA Advisor, Snejana Teneva, in close cooperation with Regional Educational Advising Coordinator Cheryl Francisconi, has launched an Opportunity Fund program in Bulgaria beginning in February 2016. From numerous applicants, twelve eleventh-graders from all across the country were selected to take part in the first phase of the program, which covers the cost of test preparation, testing fees, and translation of application documents, and also provides support for creating CVs and writing admissions essays, and guidance in selecting universities to which to apply. If successfully admitted to US universities with full financial aid, these students will go on to the next phase of Opportunity Funds during the 2016-2017 school year, which covers visa fees as well as travel and relocation to the US.



The Opportunity Funds students with their English teacher

The first module on Redesigned SAT prep took place at the National Training and Logistics Center of the Bulgarian Red Cross in the village of Lozen near Sofia on April 3-9. It gathered eleven Opportunity Funds students and three lecturers. Official guests to the first Opportunity Funds training were Angela Rodel, Executive Director, Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission and Tammy Paltchikov, Cultural Attaché, U.S. Embassy.

The three courses included in the event's curriculum- Redesigned SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, Redesigned SAT Math and Researching Universities were led by Asst. Prof. Boyka Bozoukova, University of National and World Economy, Ivan Dinkov, math teacher, American College of Sofia, and Snezhana Teneva. The lectures and training addressed various exam tasks, strategies and challenges and explored ways to further strengthen students' preparation for applying to accredited colleges and universities in the U.S.

We strongly believe that the Opportunity Funds students will make the best use of the knowledge and know-how acquired during this unique opportunity and wish them all a very successful and rewarding application process.



Dialogue in the Dark

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN BULGARIA:

FROM THE TOP DOWN AND BOTTOM UP

by Zachary Wenner, current US student researcher

Two years into the Great Recession, the European Commission called for a "new beginning": "The crisis is a wake-up call, the moment where we recognize that 'business as usual' would consign us to a gradual decline, to the second rank of the new global order. This is Europe's moment of truth. It is the time to be bold and ambitious."



This "wake up call" included both the mandate of renewed economic growth and increasing consideration of the nature and drivers of such growth. Given this deceleration, the next decade's economic (re)expansion would have to promote a more equitable and environmentally-friendly Europe.

This principle, with its conceptual antecedent in the "Horizontal Social Clause" of the Lisbon Treaty, was codified into the strategy of "smart, sustainable and inclusive" growth. According to this mandate, these priorities would be mutually reinforcing and "at the heart" of EU programming.

They include:

- **Smart growth**
  – developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- **Sustainable growth**
  – promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.
- **Inclusive growth**
  – fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion.

This three-pronged vision of growth became the guiding principle and, in the case of the EU's financial infrastructure, investment thesis for EU 2020. These principles would not only constitute a subset of EU programming, they would serve as the North Star for all of them. Would GDP expansion accelerate or mitigate environmental degradation? Would it create pathways to integrate those at the bottom of the economic spectrum? Would it be resilient to global destabilization as economic or environmental shocks resonated among the most vulnerable segments of society? And finally, would this growth strategy lift Europe from recession? At the time when the EU institutionalized this strategy, millions across Europe were still jobless, while the financial crisis continued to destabilize the macroeconomic environment. In Central Eastern Europe, for example, exports had fallen by 23%, while the region's imports contracted by as much as 28%; in Bulgaria, a country which had only recently joined the EU, growing risk aversion among foreign investors continued to decelerate capital inflows.

Just as these problems were becoming more acute, the capacity of government, civil society and philanthropy – the traditional stewards of the public welfare — was attenuating; greater demand for social services came at a time during which governments, bridled with crisis, saw expenditures and revenues continue to diverge. The notion that business would drive economic growth while the government and civil society would address social problems — tenuous to begin with — was proving even less tenable. **If the EU was to recover, and if it was to recover in a way that embodied the ideals of socioeconomic equity and environmental sustainability, it would have to find a way for the private, civil and public sectors to collaborate.**

This notion has been a driving force that has blurred the traditional boundaries between industries, sectors and market actors. For-profit business and investors have increasingly embraced the notion that they can generate both a financial profit and social and environmental value; non-profit organizations increasingly pioneer revenue-generating ventures to increase the scale and scope of their impact; and the public sector continues to work to accelerate this hybridization rather than to affix traditional boundaries.

Social entrepreneurship rests at the confluence of these trends. According to the EU, social entrepreneurship combines "entrepreneurial activity with a social purpose. Its main aim is to have a social impact, rather than maximize profit for owners or shareholders." They combine philanthropic values with market-based principles, leveraging consumer purchasing power or market gaps to advance pre-defined social and environment goals. They navigate between the public, private and civil sectors. And they advance the precepts of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth through both the products they create and the people they employ.

Based on the latest figures available, for example, the "social economy" in the EU provides over 11 million jobs (accounting for 6% of total employment), many of them for the vulnerable segments of the population. In Bulgaria, approximately



The Ideas Factory Empatheast Conference for social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria

5,000 enterprises self- identify as social enterprises. According to the Ministry of Economy and Energy, they employ over 500,000 Bulgarians in areas spanning social services delivery, employment of disability populations, employment services, educational access and health care.

In Bulgaria, as in the broader EU, social entrepreneurship has evolved from both the "top down" and "bottom up." At the policy level, Bulgaria's Working Group on the Social Economy, a quasi-governmental body, is working to provide legal, fiscal and conceptual definition for these types of organizations. Eighty percent of Bulgarian social enterprises indicated the absence of enabling policy as an impediment, according to an Innovative Social Enterprise Development Network report. Through policy papers and convenings, the Working Group seeks to lower this barrier--addressing key questions related to the form, structure and support mechanisms for these organizations. From a regulatory perspective, should they be treated more like for-profits or non-profits? How should their impact be evaluated? How can the the public sector create an enabling environment for their growth?

At the grassroots level, social entrepreneurs continue to pioneer ventures that address both local and regional social issues. Ideas Factory, an organization that works to advance social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria, has helped to develop this nascent ecosystem. Yanina Taneva, co-founder of the organization, notes that the "field has been developing slowly and following the diverse notion of 'social' in the management of organizations active in the field. Consolidation is rather hard. However, there is a new generation needing multilevel support in their efforts to shift the traditional narrative of social entrepreneurship left over from socialist times with new content and examples."

These types of organizations navigate many of the challenges faced by both nonprofit and private sector businesses. As revenue-generating businesses with a primary social mission, they rest at the nexus of traditional and social business. Due to their novel form and function, practitioners still navigate issues such as the right terminology and developing the appropriate mindset. "When it comes to social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria, I'd say that we're overflowing with fancy buzzwords," writes Evgeni Mitev, an entrepreneur and part of the 2015/2016 Ashoka Leadership Program in Social Entrepreneurship "Social entrepreneurship, start-ups, social change and innovations are some of them (trying to sell hot air). Actually Bulgaria is just at the beginning of a long path that includes not only the outer world, but also the mindset of the people involved."

Mr. Evgeni leads the activities of Dialogue in the Dark in Bulgaria – an organization which provides opportunities for blind guides to lead groups through specially-designed darkened rooms. In this capacity, "a reversal of roles is created: people who can usually see are confronted with the sudden withdrawal of their key-sense sight and are taken out of their familiar environment. Blind people are the experts out of their living circumstances, and provide the public with security and a sense of orientation by transmitting to them a world without pictures." The organization employs visually-impaired individuals not in spite of their disability, but because of the unique perspective and skills they offer – a value proposition that attracts companies in their teambuilding efforts, along with a wide range of individuals and organizations. Mr. Evgeni and his colleagues have led a variety of



"Many of the organizations and individuals I've spoken to did not describe themselves as "social entrepreneurs." Rather, they were "educators, techies, investors, and innovators" who leveraged their businesses or organizations to drive social change."

Dialogue in the Dark variations in Bulgaria, including Dinner in the Dark, Wine tasting in the Dark, Concert in the Dark, Poetry in the Dark and Team-building in the Dark.

Many of the organizations and individuals I've spoken to did not describe themselves as "social entrepreneurs." Rather, they were "educators, techies, investors, and innovators" who leveraged their businesses or organizations to drive social change. When social organizations and companies take this approach—when they see themselves first and foremost as problem solvers— "social entrepreneurship" is no longer a niche concept in Bulgaria. Rather, it becomes a universal tool and its best characteristics continue to provide opportunities for sustainable and scalable change in the region.



"I cannot emphasize how important this academic education is for my future professional development."

MARIYA SHARKOVA

I am among the 160 luckiest professionals from all over the world to be selected as a Hubert Humphrey Principal for the academic yesr 2015-2016. Moreover, I have the privilege of being assigned to one of the best universities in USA: Emory University. The School of Public Health is ranked seventh among public health schools in the country.

Being a Hubert Humphrey Fellow in the public health/health policy field in Atlanta provides many opportunities, as the other name of the city is "the capital of public health". The main reason is the fact that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) headquarters are based here and therefore many of the legendary professionals in public health either work or visit Atlanta regularly. Whether you need to learn more about legal lessons after Ebola or the latest news about Zika; the newest cancer treatment; the last public health achievements or healthcare disparities, this is the best place for doing that. This program gives me unique knowledge in subjects such as Alternative Dispute Resolution and Mediation in healthcare settings, Legal Epidemiology, Comparative Healthcare Systems, Public Health Law and even more. Emory University attracts many teachers with public health experience and students interested in that field of study, due to the close affiliation with the CDC, the research opportunities at the Medical University and the cozy and friendly campus' great atmosphere. I cannot emphasize how important this academic education is for my future professional development.

Additionally, Emory offers meetings and lectures (learn and lunch and brown bags) on a weekly basis with different professionals form the country and abroad, as well as free transportation to and from campus, different social events (concerts, farm markets, exhibits), support for international students, job fairs, and networking.

The Hubert Humphrey Fellowship program is very well organized by IIE and the coordinators, based



Mariya (second from left) enjoying a hike with family and friends

in the Humphrey Department of Global Health. They provide assistance to the fellows in finding accommodation, obtaining Social Security Numbers, and opening bank accounts.

Among the most important help we receive is personal academic advice and assistance in finding organizations for the Professional Affiliation required for each fellow. In terms of this component of the program, I am proud to be part of the CDC Public Health Law Program, working on the Healthcare Associated Infections project in a great team of experienced healthcare attorneys. Usually, it is very difficult to be accepted as an intern there, but the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship/Fulbright speaks for itself. It is a great reference.

Despite the commitment to the academic and professional part of the program, it can be fun, too. All the fellows have "host families," helping them to really immerse themselves in the American life style with Thanksgiving dinners, barbeques, Halloween, and different festivals.

Atlanta is situated at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains, and it is a great place for hikers. Here are the headquarters of CNN, Coca Cola and Delta, it is the place where Martin L. King rests, as well as the home of Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*.

The Hubert Humphrey Program is unique, because the group of fellows is so diverse, you can never be bored. My colleagues come from different countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Laos, Egypt, Pakistan, and Brazil. We all supported each other during the coup in Burkina Faso late last year, the hostage crisis in Mali, the earthquake in Pakistan. We also have fun with barbeques at the swimming pool, potluck dinners, picnics and field trips. One of the most exciting times during the year was our meeting with President Jimmy Carter, the "father" of the program. Only the Hubert Humphrey Fellows from Emory are granted the privilege of meeting him during the special Humphrey workshop on Global Development and Social Justice that took place at Rollins School of Public Health last week.

"Among the most important help we receive is personal academic advice and assistance in finding organizations for the Professional Affiliation required for each fellow. "

As my program comes to an end, I can already feel its influence on my career. The network I created could be a great starting point for future cooperation and mutual projects. I can't wait to come back and start implementing the good practices I witnessed here during my fellowship and I hope more people will be given the opportunity to have this experience. I would like to thank the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission for this prestigious award and I hope to be an "ambassador" for this great program when I return.

Bulgarian Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2015-2016

Senior Scholars

Dr. Kiril Avramov

Field of specialization: Political Science
Home institution: New Bulgarian University, Department of Political Science, Center for Social Practices
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Texas at Austin, Austin TEXAS
Fall 2015

Assoc. Prof. Iliya Denev

Field of specialization: Plant Physiology
Home institution: University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski", Plant Physiology and Molecular Biology Department
Host institutions in the U.S.: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg VIRGINIA; Pennsylvania State University, University Park PENNSYLVANIA
Spring 2016

Dr. Stanislav Panev

Field of specialization: Computer Science
Home institution: Technical University of Sofia, Faculty of Telecommunications
Host institution in the U.S.: Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh PENNSYLVANIA
Fall 2015

Assoc. Prof. Gergana Tekath

Field of specialization: Ethnomusicology
Home institution: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Art Studies
Host institution in the U.S.: University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles CALIFORNIA
Spring 2016

Dr. Dimitar Valchev

Field of specialization: Computer Science
Home institution: University of Food Technologies – Plovdiv, Computer Systems and Technologies Department
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Rochester, Rochester NEW YORK
Spring 2016

Dr. Paskal Zhelev

Field of specialization: Economics
Home institution: University of National and World Economy, Intl. Economic Relations and Business Department
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana ILLINOIS
Fall 2015

Research Scholarship for the Study of Civil Society

Dimitar Ruev

Field of specialization: Regional Development
Home institution: Municipality of Dryanovo, Directorate Urban Planning, Investment and Economic Policy
Host institution in the U.S.: City of Arcadia, Arcadia CALIFORNIA
Fall 2015

Graduate Students

Milena Berbenkova

Field of study: Art Management
Home institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: Columbia College – Chicago – Graduate School, Chicago, IL

Lena Borislavova

Field of study: Law
Home institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: LL.M.
Host institution in the U.S.: Harvard University – Law School, Cambridge, MA

Nelly Gospodinova

Field of study: Education
Home institution: University of Rousse "Angel Kantchev"
Pursued degree: MA
Host institution in the U.S.: Lehigh University – College of Education, Bethlehem, PA

Boris Kanchev

Field of study: Law, Thanks to Scandinavia award
Home institution: Sofia University "St.Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: LL.M.
Host institution in the U.S.: University of Florida, Fredric G. Levin College of Law, Gainesville, FL

Peter Penev

Field of study: Molecular Biology
Home institution: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia
Pursued degree: MS in Bioinformatics
Host institution in the U.S.: The Georgia Institute of Technology – Graduate School, Atlanta, GA

Teodor Stanilov

Field of study: Technology Management
Home institution: Technical University of Sofia
Pursued degree: MBA
Host institution in the U.S.: Emory University – Goizueta Business School, Atlanta, GA

BG Grantees
Academic Year 2015-2016

U.S. Fulbright Grantees
Academic Year 2015-2016

Non-Degree Research Grants for Doctoral Students

Medea Yankova

Field of study: Textile Design
Home institution: National Academy of Art, Sofia
Host institutions in the U.S.: University of Hawaii at Hilo, Hilo, HI
Fall 2015

Hubert Humphrey Fellows

Maria Sharkova

Field of specialization: Public Health
Home institution: University Hospital for Active Treatment St.George, Plovdiv
Host institution in the U.S.: Emory University, Atlanta, GA

Lecturers

Dr. Ronald Harvey

Field of Specialization: Psychology
Home Institution: DePaul University, Chicago, IL
Host Institution in Bulgaria: National Center for Addictions, Sofia
Spring 2016

Dr. Carol MacCurdy

Field of Specialization: American Literature
Home Institution: California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", Plovdiv
Spring 2016

Mira Niagolova

Field of Specialization: TV Production
Home Institution: Champlain College, Burlington, VT
Host Institution in Bulgaria: National Academy of Theater and Film Arts, Sofia
Spring 2016

Dr. Boyka Stefanova

Field of Specialization: Political Science
Home Institution: University of Texas San Antonio, San Antonio, TX
Host Institution in Bulgaria: University of National and World Economy, Sofia
Spring 2016

Dr. Isabelle White

Field of Specialization: American Literature
Home Institution: Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY
Host Institution in Bulgaria: University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. Cyril and St Methodius", Veliko Tarnovo
Spring 2016

Graduate Students

Michelle Asbill

Field of Specialization: Social Work
Project Title: Prostitute Typology and Decision-Making Among At-Risk Bulgarian Institutionalized Girls
Host Institution in Bulgaria: University of National and World Economy, Sofia

Julia Irons

Field of Specialization: History
Project Title: Sociocultural Identity in Ancient Thrace
Host Institution in Bulgaria: New Bulgarian University, Sofia

Rachel Susser

Field of Specialization: Music
Project Title: Flutes of Bulgaria and Romania
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts, Plovdiv

Zachary Wenner

Field of Specialization: Political Science
Project Title: Social Enterprise: A Bulgarian Model for Inclusive Economic Growth
Host Institution in Bulgaria: Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

U.S. Fulbright Grantees

Academic Year 2015-2016

English Teaching Assistants

McKinley Alden
Field of Specialization: Linguistics
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Kaitlyn Alkass
Field of Specialization: English Literature
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Alex Bransford
Field of Specialization: Education
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Amy Bruckbauer
Field of Specialization: Biology, Neuroscience
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Colby Fleming
Field of Specialization: Philosophy, Sociology, Russian
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Reid Furubayashi
Field of Specialization: Philosophy, Politics, Economics
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Anna Fuselier
Field of Specialization: International Affairs
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Lauren Gieseke
Field of Specialization: History, Political Science
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Ryan Hedrick
Field of Specialization: Linguistics, Political Science
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Emily Herlinger
Field of Specialization: Education
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Allegra Hyde
Field of Specialization: Creative Writing
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Moriah Kent
Field of Specialization: TEFL
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Angela Koch
Field of Specialization: Art Education
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Connor Leach
Field of Specialization: Slavic Languages
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Katelyn Lee
Field of Specialization: Linguistics
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Andrew Malin
Field of Specialization: History, International Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Claire Manning
Field of Specialization: Comparative Human Development
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Christopher Mayers
Field of Specialization: East European Studies, Russian
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Molly O'Keefe
Field of Specialization: Theatre
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Sophia Padelford
Field of Specialization: Biology
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Christine Pardue
Field of Specialization: English, TESOL
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Nicole Pilar
Field of Specialization: International Political Economy
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Montana Rogers
Field of Specialization: English, Creative Writing, Music
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Brianna Shawhan
Field of Specialization: Journalism
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Erin Speltz
Field of Specialization: Peace Studies, Economics
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Jason Syphrett
Field of Specialization: International Studies
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Wilhelmina van den Berg
Field of Specialization: History, Education
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Natalie Vieira
Field of Specialization: Resource Economics, Political Science
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Sirena Wurth
Field of Specialization: Political Science, Communications
Project Title: Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Bulgaria

Bulgaria: The Balkan Surprise

Spotlight on Fulbright Alumnus **Brian C. Murphy**

by Angela Rodel



Professor Yankov with Jessup Team

U.S. attorney Brian C. Murphy's Fulbright experience in Bulgaria launched a more than 20-year-long international career supporting the rule of law, good governance and market reforms that has taken him from Sofia to Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, Armenia and many places in between.

When the Berlin Wall crumbled in 1989, Brian C. Murphy was serving as chairperson of the Federal Bar Association's International Law Section. He had been as a public servant for more than 20 years, mostly with U. S. Government agencies in Washington, D.C., and also in private law practice. During the course of his work with the FBA, it became clear that the Republic of Bulgaria was among the former Eastern European countries most interested in and receptive to democratization and the rule of law – then-Bulgarian Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov, at the time the youngest Prime Minister in Europe, and also a lawyer, was exceptionally receptive to Western legal reforms. Indeed, then-Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger termed Bulgaria, the "Balkan Surprise," because of its receptivity to post-socialist reforms. This inspired Murphy to apply for a Fulbright law lectureship in the Republic of Bulgaria. For a three-semester period, between 1992 and 1994, Murphy taught at the Faculty of Law, as well as at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University.

> "Murphy decisively won the respect and admiration of law students and colleagues by his revival of Bulgaria's participation in the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, which had petered out several years earlier. "

Initially, not all of Murphy's colleagues or even his students were so open to Western legal practice as was Prime Minister Dimitrov – his lectures in Comparative Administrative Law and the Law of International Business Transactions, scheduled late in the afternoon, were sparsely attended, until he hit upon the idea of luring students to

class with the promise of free pizza and by passing out casebooks to the students (which were difficult and quite expensive to obtain). However, Murphy decisively won the respect and admiration of law students and colleagues by his revival of Bulgaria's participation in the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, which had petered out several years earlier. Jessup is the world's largest moot court competition, with participants from some 600 law schools in more than 80 countries, and is a simulation of a hypothetical dispute between countries before the International Court of Justice. Murphy tirelessly recruited and trained talented Bulgarian law students and raised funds to bring the winning Bulgarian team to the international Jessup semi-final rounds in Washington, D.C, in 1994 ,where they performed creditably. The Jessup team members were most fortunate to have such an accomplished jurist as the estimable Professor [and former Ambassador and United Nations Judge] Alexander Yankov, to judge their efforts before going to Washington, D.C. The Jessup competition has become Murphy's lasting legacy in Bulgaria, as he returns to the country every year to participate in the competition. In 2016, Murphy has arranged for not one, but two Bulgarian teams to go to Washington to showcase the talents of more than one Bulgarian university in this prestigious international forum.

"Working with bright and aspiring young law students and young lawyers in Bulgaria was the most fulfilling role of my career in public service," Murphy notes. "I remain in regular contact with a number of my former law students and colleagues." This is certainly the case, judging from his packed schedule of meetings with friends, colleagues and former students during a recent visit to Bulgaria for the Jessup competition in February of 2016.

As if reviving the Jessup Competition were not enough, another highlight of Brian C. Murphy's Fulbright experience was the late U.S. Chief Justice William Rehnquist's visit to Bulgaria. "I was asked by then-Bulgarian Supreme Court Chairperson Ivan Grigorov to invite and escort the late U.S. Chief Justice, William Rehnquist, on his first-ever visit to a newly-democratic state—Bulgaria," Murphy recalls. "I did so, and Chief Justice Rehnquist met with many Bulgarian judges during his visit. The Rehnquist visit eventuated in a number of visits, in turn, to the U.S.A. by Bulgarian judges. His visit marked the first time in memory that such a senior U.S. official had visited Bulgaria." Murphy credits his exceptional former law student and close friend, Svilen Todorov, with inspiring Rehnquist's visit. As a young Bulgarian student, Todorov so impressed the long-serving Clerk of the Supreme Court of the United States, William K. Suter, at a luncheon in Washington, D.C. that he endorsed the Chief Justice's visit to Bulgaria.

After his Fulbright experience in Bulgaria, Murphy went on to work in numerous countries, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Armenia, Rwanda, Kenya and Eritrea. Yet, no matter where he has gone in the world, Murphy has maintained close ties to Bulgaria in the more than 20 years since his first visit, returning regularly for the Jessup competition and to visit Bulgarian friends, colleagues and former students: "As the first situs of my work abroad, Bulgaria and Bulgarians earned a very special place with me. A beautiful country, with an educated, upwardly mobile and informed populace, it has indeed proven to be the 'Balkan Surprise!'"



Na dobur chas, Ioli!

Iolanta Koprinova, the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission's long-serving administrative secretary, retired from her position in February of 2016. She joined the Fulbright team in 1995, in the first years after its founding, and was a pillar of support for generations of Fulbrighters, fielding phone calls and questions and making sure applications and information got where they needed to go. Her subtle yet impeccable taste was apparent in the design of Fulbright communications, as well as parties and events, which bear her aesthetic stamp to this day. She was an invaluable link in bringing new ED Angela Rodel (who remembers Ioli from her own Fulbright grant back in 1996-97!) up to speed with her new duties. The whole Fulbright Bulgaria staff and community wish Ioli happiness in her well-deserved retirement!

Turning the Wheels of Time:

An Interview with Fulbright Alumnus **Boyan Dobrev**

by Angela Rodel



Visitors to Sofia's newly remodeled Central Railway Station will now have the opportunity to travel not only through Bulgaria, but also through time – thanks to Fulbright alumnus Boyan Dobrev's new multimedia installation "The Wheels of Time," which was unveiled on February 12, 2016.

Located on the second floor of the railway station's lobby, this 24 by 6 meter lighted panel from a distance shows a train's powerful metal wheels; however, when looked at from up close, the picture "disintegrates" into a mosaic made up of 5,600 individual pictures from the history of the Bulgarian National Railway. In the interview below, Professor Boyan Dobrev, who teaches wall-painting at the National Academy of Art in Sofia, discusses the inspiration behind this project and his work as a whole.

What is the idea behind the "Wheels of Time" installation?

I could call it a 2380 by 620 cm time-capsule. It contains 140 years of memories, visualized in photos of all kinds – trains, people's faces, suitcase handles, sandwiches, celebrations and departures…. When creating a piece of art, the artist should always keep in mind that his piece of art is a message. The message should reach the persons for whom it is intended. My message created in the lobby of the Central Railway Station in Sofia is expected to reach the widest range of personalities and cultural identities. So I created a piece of art where we have realist documentation of 5,600 moments connected with Bulgarian railways, as well as the abstract image of the Bulgarian railways in one. The viewer gets both by simply moving closer or





further from the "Wheels of Time." The metamorphosis of the abstract image into a repository of documents is the compositional method I decided to use here for the first time, but one of the greatest advantages for artists working in space is to use the power of space properly.

Where did you find the photos that make up the "pixels" of the larger image and how did you arrange them into this enormous panel?

The institutions helped me. I got a permission to take photos in museums and train depots. Todor Kableshkov Transport University and BDZ (Bulgarian State Railways) gave me all photos I asked for. At the opening a person came and told me that he saw his photo in the 5,600 photos incorporated in the image. He told me that I hadn't gotten his permission to use it. My answer was that if he likes, I could give him all the other 5,599 photos in exchange…. He didn't answer, but finally he told me that he likes the "Wheels of Time."

What is the history of public art in Bulgaria and how does this work fit into it?

Public art in Bulgaria, or *stenopis*, as it is popularly known in Bulgaria, plays a fundamental role in Bulgarian culture, because Bulgarians are Orthodox Christians, thus wall paintings have been a way to express the divine other than with words since 865. Public art also played an important role during the totalitarian period as a place where state propaganda reached the people. Today new media substitutes for the old techniques in public art worldwide. The "Wheels of Time" is one of the first examples of this worldwide trend in Bulgaria. I hope the "Wheels of Time" marks a new period!

How has your Fulbright experience shaped your practice as an artist and educator?

I had the exceptional honor to be a Fulbright grantee twice! My first Fulbright was at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in 1997-98, where the experience I had helped me create my book *The Principles of Visual Composition.* It turned out to be a textbook for my students as well as my personal statement about what I am going to do with my art in the future. At SAIC I enrolled in an interactive multimedia class and it turned me from an artist working in classical media to a digital person.

My second Fulbright was as a lecturer at CalArts in Valencia, California in 2007. I taught an interactive multimedia class there, and my experience was on many levels. It forced me to face the challenge of teaching at the one of the best art schools in the world and to be in a place where the future of technologies is being shaped.

I have also been lucky to participate in the events of Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission ever since I came back from SAIC, from 1998 until today. This has definitely helped me to be the artist I am now!



The school as it first opened in 1885, the year of the Bulgarian Unification

Exarch Joseph Foreign Language School, Razgrad

by Iliana Dimitrova

In this issue of our newsletter we would like to introduce you to one of our long-term partners in the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship program - the Exarch Joseph Foreign Language School in Razgrad. After hosting volunteer English teachers from the American Peace Corps for ten consecutive years between 1992 and 2011, the school has continued its commitment to quality foreign language education and has been a host institution for Fulbright ETAs consistently since 2012.

The impressive building of the school was designed on the eve of the Bulgarian Unification by Friedrich Grünanger, an Austro-Hungarian architect who was residing in Razgrad at the time as the city's chief architect. During his thirty years of work in Bulgaria, Friedrich Grünanger designed and constructed numerous remarkable public and residential buildings – the Synagogue, the Central Mineral Baths and the Seminary in Sofia, the Teacher's Institute in Kyustendil and the Regional History Museum in Ruse, to name just a few. The citizens of Razgrad entrusted him with this project as the secular school in town, teaching Bulgarian and Turkish girls and boys, had only nine classrooms and was becoming too small for the growing needs of the city in the turbulent years following the Liberation from Ottoman rule. The land for the building, said to hold the remains of an old sanctuary, was previously owned by Myukerem Hanim, the sister of one of Razgrad's feudal lords, Rifat Bey. Myukerem Hanim was one of the town's respected and refined women. She owned the first piano in Razgrad, and after moving to Turkey around 1882 she gave it as a gift to Stanka Nikolitsa, one of the

first Bulgarian female poets, a teacher and interpreter from Serbian. Stanka Nikolitsa was also the wife of Todor Ikonomov, one of the distinguished Bulgarian revivalists, a writer, publisher, politician and a passionate activist striving for the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate.

In the fall of 1885 the new school welcomed its first students, all male, and just ten years later it became one of only nine male-only schools in the country to offer all classes from first to seventh grade (which corresponds to grades I to XI as we know them today). In 1902, to mark its 25 years of service to the community, the school was named after Exarch Joseph I and received the blessing of the Bulgarian Exarch himself.

Between 1948 and 1991 the school's name changed to that of Nikola Vaptsarov, a prominent Bulgarian poet, communist and revolutionary. In 1991, by order of the Ministry of Public Education, the school was split into the Nikola Vaptsarov Primary School and the Exarch Joseph Foreign Language School, which for the first time offered intensive instruction in the English, French and German languages.

The further development of the school in the following years soon made it a preferred choice for students from the region who wanted to continue their secondary education in a progressive and supportive environment. The hard work of management and faculty has paid off and today the school boasts numerous medals and awards won by its students from national and international Olympiads and competitions, such as the International Physics Olympiad (IPhO) in Canada and the International Biology Olympiad in China. The school's basketball, gymnastics (girls) and badminton (girls) teams have competed internationally in Brazil, the Czech Republic and Chinese Taipei after winning first and second places in the republican championships.

"Today the school boasts numerous medals and awards won by its students from national and international Olympiads and competitions, such as the International Physics Olympiad (IPhO) in Canada and the International Biology Olympiad in China. "

The school today has 532 students and 37 teachers, of whom nine teach English, three German, two Russian and one Spanish.

In recent years the school has taken part in multiple initiatives aimed at improving the learning environment, such as USPEH, an initiative of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Classroom in the Open, an initiative of the Ministry of the Environment and Water. The school also participates in many national programs initiated by the Ministry of Education and providing support for primary and high school students based on their individual needs and unique talents. In 2012 the school won funding from the America for Bulgaria Foundation to support the complete renovation of the first floor of the school's west wing.

The principal of Exarch Joseph FLS, Peycho Georgiev, was among thirty high school principals from state and municipals schools across Bulgaria selected to participate in a week long education leadership seminar inVelingrad, Bulgaria, in April 2015. After presenting his concept for improved foreign language learning, Peycho Georgiev won a place among the fifteen finalists selected by the Institute of International Education to take part in a customized ten-day leadership and professional development experiential program in New York, USA in the fall. Both trainings are sponsored by the America for Bulgaria Foundation as part of the Bulgarian Young Leaders Program.



The faculty at Exarch Joseph Foreign Language School, 2015

Angel Igov

An Anything but Meek Writer

by Angela Rodel

Angel Igov, a 2010-2011 Fulbright Visiting Student Researcher to UC Berkeley, has just published his second novel, *The Meek*. A literary critic and teacher of translation in the English Department at Sofia University, Angel himself has translated into Bulgarian major names from contemporary English literature, including Paul Auster, Martin Amis, Ian McEwan and Angela Carter.



His first novel, *A Short Tale of Shame*, was translated and published in the United States by Open Letter Press. *The Meek* examines one of the darkest chapters of Bulgarian history, the *Naroden sud*, or People's Court, a series of trials staged in 1945 in which nearly all of Bulgaria's pre-communism political elite – three regents, eight royal advisors, 22 cabinet ministers, 67 MPs from the 24th National Assembly, 47 generals and senior army officers – was sentenced to death with no right of appeal. However, Igov's novel does not deal with the "high profile" victims of this purge, but rather explores what might motivate the common man to take part in these trials. His main character, Emil Strezov, is a young leftist who through happenstance finds himself a prosecutor in the People's Court trials of artists and writers. Narrated in the first-person plural, this "we" are his neighbors in Sofia's Yuchbunar District, a Greek chorus of sorts that in the end judges Strezov himself.

> "I'm not sure I can rationally explain my fascination with Yuchbunar - which was not a particularly sanitary place and which does not, strictly speaking, even exist nowadays. Call it a writer's intuition if you wish, but this collective urban narrator seems to have become a major point of interest for readers and critics."

What made you decide to write about the People's Court?

It was not a sudden decision at a particular moment of my life; I had been interested in these events for a long time. I guess I was able to find in them a manifestation of some issues that are of perpetual interest to me, such as the relativity of justice and the transformations an unexpectedly empowered person suffers. Also, the general historic period is one that I am somehow fond of, and I wanted, among other things, to recreate the atmosphere and zeitgeist of mid-20th century Sofia.

Why did you decide to narrate much of the novel from the point of view of Strezov's neighbors, the Yuchbunartsi?

My initial idea was simply to write a novel in the second person. Then, gradually, a narrator evolved, addressing the protagonist in the second person, and then this narrator became the collective voice of those unidentified young men from the proletarian neighbourhood of Yuchbunar. I'm not sure I can rationally explain my fascination with Yuchbunar – which was not a particularly sanitary place and which does not, strictly speaking, even exist nowadays. Call

it a writer's intuition if you wish, but this collective urban narrator seems to have become a major point of interest for readers and critics. Among other things, it reinforces my unheroic reading of the events, adding the perspective of people who are highly skeptical and ironic most of the time.

How much of the novel is based on documentary evidence about the events of 1945?

A lot of it. It actually contains sheer documentary material as well, interspersed throughout the narrative. This is, amazingly, the first Bulgarian novel about those traumatic events and I had to be certain I got the facts right. Evidence is not so easy to find either, especially evidence about the everyday aspect of the events. How exactly did the trials proceed? What did the premises look like? How were the prosecutors and judges chosen? By whom? I had to find the answers to these questions before I started, and I went on browsing the archives through the process of writing as well.

Excerpt from *The Meek*

In the thick February fog, saturated with the scent of coal, a young man was standing on the bridge by the Yuchbunar baths, tearing pages out of the notebook in his hand and tossing them into the river. When the final page had been carried off by the current, he seemed to hesitate for a moment. Then with sudden decisiveness he tore off the cover as well and tossed it into the dark water, which in places glittered with thin slivers of ice. Without looking down the young man turned around and quickly set off towards the center of town. At that time of the night, there were no other passersby: the streets were snowy and deserted. Here and there, from the yards in the side streets came the listless barking of dogs. The bright breath of the electric street lights on Pirotska did not manage to pierce the fog, but hung around the lamp posts like ragged halos. The man's footsteps crunched on the trampled-down snow, which was black from soot and cinders. He didn't meet anyone, and even if he had, his neighbors from Yuchbunar likely would not have recognized him at first.

That was you.

We knew you, Emil Strezov, for whole months and years we were following your every move; and even though we didn't see you then on that bridge, even in our sleep we knew that you were there. Carried away in their rapid movement, our eyeballs still noticed everything, even through our closed eyelids: the gray tatters of the fog, the lonely man's footsteps that sprang up in the snow. We saw, we heard. We remembered how you moved to the neighborhood, how you came from that nearby town, so insignificant that its name isn't even worth mentioning, we saw with our own eyes how from a down and out high school student you became an underappreciated poet, and then the generous autumn of '44 suddenly thrust into your hands the power to decide human fates. We joked that one day, our children, when they entered that university of yours that you never did finish, would come across one of your poem in the thick anthologies, they would read it and say: well, it's not bad. And we would tell them: Emil Strezov, you say? He lived across the street back in the day. If you only knew what a smack I gave him once. And what did he do? The kids would ask. What do you mean, what? He wasn't a good-for-nothing like us. What was he like? He was… He was the little old ladies' favorite. He was Uncle Petar's polite tenant, he was always rushing here and there, up until that autumn with books tucked under his arm, after that with a pistol tucked in his belt, but he always found time to say hello and chat a bit about the great events that had taken place and the even greater ones that were to come. But if any of us had passed you on that night, he surely would have noticed that there was something strange in your gait, in your gaze, in the wrinkles unexpectedly carved into your forehead, which made you look grown-up and furious; that one of us would even have wrinkled up his own forehead in turn, wondering whether he hadn't mistaken someone else for you and whether that rushed young man was the same person who so bloodthirstily, his face ablaze in a smile, had made the rounds of the Sofia Streets in early September.



2016 Fulbright Berlin Seminar

by Iliana Dimitrova



Fulbrighters in Berlin, 2016

"In our presentation we were able to give people a quick glimpse into our diverse lives as ETAs, particularly focusing on our involvement in our Bulgarian communities. "

Seven Fulbright English Teaching Assistants represented Bulgaria at the 62nd annual seminar organized by the German Fulbright Commission on March 20-24, 2016. Over 300 American Fulbrighters from 20 countries in Europe got together to network and share their experiences, challenges and achievements.

Here is how our Fulbright Bulgaria representatives experienced this wonderful event:

"Although the seven of us were small in number, we found many opportunities to share our experiences", says Lauren Gieseke, a Fulbright ETA in the town of Shumen. "From the beginning of the conference, our unique position as Bulgarian ETAs was clear.... We were, if not the only Fulbrighters from Eastern Europe, at least one of the largest groups from this part of the globe. ... Other Fulbrighters were continually surprised both by the number of ETAs in Bulgaria and our representation at the conference. We thus sought opportunities to share our experience and answer questions, including Molly and Sirena's excellent presentation about life in Bulgaria and a subsequent horo lesson for Fulbrighters from Spain, Norway, and Germany."

When Molly O'Keefe, ETA in Stara Zagora and Sirena Wurth, ETA in Razgrad, decided to apply as panel presenters, they had no idea they were facing stiff competition: "Out of over 50 applications we were selected to present on our topic "Bulgaria: Beyond the Classroom". I was really pleased we were selected because after just the first day of the conference I was noticing a pattern in the reactions of people after asking which country we were representing. The answer of "Bulgaria" was met with frequent follow up questions and curiosity because most people knew little to nothing about the country..... In our presentation we were able to give people a quick glimpse into our diverse lives as ETAs, particularly focusing on our involvement in our Bulgarian communities. We highlighted the differences between life and teaching in bigger and smaller towns, as well as the Bulgarian English Speaking Tournaments (BEST). In the question and answer portion of the presentations that followed we were also able to engage the audience and teach them Благодаря and Наздраве and led a folk dancing lesson afterwards which was a lot of fun and received very positive responses from the audience," shares Sirena.

After listening to presentations from Fulbright scholars, researchers and English teaching assistants, participants had the opportunity to break out into discussion groups focusing on various topics – performance arts, the role of sports, sexuality and gender expression, the impact of migration and immigration on education and many more:

"It was intriguing to hear the variegated perspectives of ETAs in large, urban areas where the arts are supported by public and private funding in comparison with smaller arts communities which tended to be influenced at the grass roots level. There was a substantial representation of theater fanatics and I was one of the few who shared my experiences with instrumental music in Europe", comments Andrew Malin, ETA in Dobrich, who attended the discussion

together with Molly O'Keefe. Since Molly studied music and theatre in college and worked in theatre before applying to Fulbright, seeking out opportunities to see innovative performances was on her priority list when coming to Bulgaria: "In fact, one of the reasons why I wanted to come to Bulgaria in the first place was because of the performing arts tradition here. I have been able to see some pretty incredible artistic work in Stara Zagora, especially at the Puppet Theatre, which hosts many international theatre festivals as well as touring companies from all over the country. The discussion group in Berlin was full of other ETAs with artistic backgrounds who shared my enthusiasm for exploring the European arts scene!", says Molly and adds "… in the EU there seems to be an abundance of government funding for art, and a general belief that art is something that can really positively contribute to the culture of a town or city. I see this positive attitude in Bulgaria, for sure in Stara Zagora, at least, the city seems to view art exhibitions,theatre performances, and concerts, as something crucial for the city, and these things are all publicly accessible, instead of only reserved for the elite few."

"After the breakout sessions were through, one of the attendees from each gave a short summation of what was discussed in front of the entire conference. We were all delighted to find that all of the Bulgaria delegation had been very vocal in almost every session", says McKinley Alden, ETA in Silistra, who joined the discussion group on gender expression. "I ended up bringing up the topic of what to do when a student approaches you for help with understanding themselves as a member of the LGBT+ community. I've had this happen several times throughout my time in Silistra, and was curious about the experiences of others. Strangely, however, it struck me at first that the students in other countries thought of their ETAs much less personally than do mine. …While it's true that being a confidant puts one in a possibly uncomfortable position, the truth of the matter was that their students didn't approach them simply because they didn't need to. Whereas the students in the West had support, structure, education, and access to resources, mine don't, and so they came to depend on me for that information…. That support network is something that we Westerners so often take for granted just living in a society where self-expression is not only encouraged, but also admired. While our contribution to the seminar may have been our sense of community, my personal takeaway has been that everyone, no matter where they live, deserves the chance to learn how to express who they are and who they want to be. I've taken that for granted for far too long, and now my students are going to have to write a lot of poetry to make up for it."

Sirena Wurth and our second ETA in Silistra, Emily Herlinger, joined the discussion on the impact of migration and immigration on education. "Our discussion focused in on refugee populations in Germany and the United States. The German ETAs shared some challenges they have seen as the schools have been changing because of the many new students, but they also shared some success stories of how communities have welcomed the new groups of people coming in and have committed to helping them. We discussed what problems we foresee there being in the future as these changes continue to unfold in parts of Europe and the United States. Because of my degree is in ESL Education, I know that in my future as an educator in the US, I will be working with these specific populations. This conversation helped me gain new insights into some of the challenges ahead for some of my future students and also our countries as we work together to help this humanitarian crisis", says Emily. In their conversations with other teaching assistants, Bulgarian ETAs discovered that location-based placement is not a universal requirement of the ETA programs and some of their peers commute to their schools for hours each day. "The experience of living in small towns and cities across the country – residing in the communities in which we teach – is truly invaluable. … For me, my job at Nikola Vaptsarov FLS and my life in Shumen go hand-in-hand; I can't imagine living outside this community", says Lauren. She also shares how American Fulbrighters at the seminar served as a resource for German Fulbrighters preparing for their projects in the U.S.:

"Aside from these informative interactions with other ETAs, the conference was an incredible opportunity to meet other Fulbrighters – European and American, scholars and teachers – working on diverse projects and living in different places, but united behind Fulbright's mission of education and cultural exchange. On the first night, for example, we divided into regions based on our American hometowns and connected with German students going to our parts of the US. We spend so much time here being cultural ambassadors with theoretical information – describing life in the US to students who have never been, for example. Giving practical advice about apartment hunting, restaurants, and local activities was, therefore, a different experience altogether."

"I came out of this experience with a greater appreciation for the community in which I live and my role as a teacher, an Asian-American male, a friend and a part-time therapist. I came back from the Berlin Seminar with a newfound respect for my surroundings and an understanding of how much the people here have taught me about respect, community, and the strength of honest human interaction", concludes Reid Furubayashi, our Fulbright ETA in the town of Montana.

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Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange

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Or contact Rada Kaneva (rkaneva@fulbright.bg), Program Officer for U.S. grantees



Competition Deadline:
October 11, 2016, 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.



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