PORTRAITS OF PARTNERSHIP

Common Vision
Shared Values
Joint Action

U.S. EMBASSY SOFIA

Letter from the Ambassador

Adversity is a great teacher and the people of Bulgaria know that better than most. In the face of difficult challenges, this country has responded with courage, creativity, and unwavering determination. The progress that Bulgaria has already achieved has proven that even more is possible. It has also proven the truth of Emerson's famous words: "when it is dark enough, you can see the stars."

During the course of this month, we wanted to look beyond the darkness of economic crisis and political uncertainty and to reach for new ideas, new approaches that would do more than just solve problems but that would also create a whole new range of possibilities. We've focused on innovation in a variety of forms and issue areas – and found the results fascinating.

First, we've been exploring new ways to communicate – more directly and immediately – with people throughout this country and around the world. We invited Bulgarians to participate in Secretary Clinton's Town Hall meeting that used the internet to connect with future leaders all across Europe. We've also launched a monthly interactive webchat that will create opportunities for regular dialogue between Bulgarian citizens and Embassy officials on issues ranging from visas to security to political debate. Our new Embassy webpage, unveiled this month, has a special feature inviting your comments and questions about U.S. policy, and we hope to hear from you soon.

We've also organized several events to highlight how innovation has changed our world and the way we deal with it. We hosted a digital videoconference with Pulitzer-prize winning journalist David Vise, author of *The Google Story*, to discuss his insights about this company and the phenomenon it has created. We also took part in Microsoft's Innovation Day, as it launched the Center for Innovative Education at Sofia Technical University along with its BizSpark program to support fledgling IT entrepreneurs. And we set up a dialogue with prominent Bulgarian bloggers to discuss issues of common concern and to consider how blogging has changed the nature of political and economic analysis.

"Traditional" issues like security and energy are also in urgent need of innovative solutions. NATO's 60th anniversary summit is explicitly looking to devise new solutions to the security challenges of Afghanistan and global terrorism. Similarly, it is critical that we cooperate to develop more rational and reliable approaches to our energy needs – both to ensure national security and to protect the health of our planet. We've worked to boost official dialogue while also modifying our personal practices here at the Embassy with recycled paper and the purchase of a hybrid vehicle.

None of these measures – on their own – represent a complete solution. But taken together they offer the potential for real progress. And they give us a chance to actually reach for those stars we can see through the darkness.

Visit the Ambassador's video profile to learn more.

Visit the Ambassador's page.

Visit us on YouTube!

Ambassador McEldowney Live on Bulgarian TV Morning Show

On March 26, Ambassador McEldowney appeared live on the popular "This Morning" show on bTV. She addressed a number of issues including the global economic crisis; the U.S. support for the Bulgarian authorities' struggle against corruption and organized crime; as well as the upcoming NATO Summit and Bulgaria's 5th anniversary in NATO.

The Ambassador said that the governments need "to act quickly and in coordination" in order to cope with the global financial and economic crisis. She drew attention to the serious problem of vote buying, and pointed out that the Integrity Pact would bring to transparency in the electoral process. The lack of justice, she said, is a common complaint she has heard from the Bulgarian people during her travels throughout the country. Throughout the interview, Ambassador McEldowney underscored the value of the strong U.S.-Bulgarian relationship, and the strong U.S. commitment to the people of Bulgaria.

In the News

Ambassador McEldowney to Students: Imagine a Better World and Make it Happen

Ambassador McEldowney participated in the launch of the Center for Innovative Education and Microsoft BizSpark at Sofia Technical University on Wednesday, March 11. While addressing the jam-packed audience of students, the Ambassador called upon the young people "to refuse to accept the status quo, to refuse to accept the world and your country as you find them now, and instead, do what is behind the driving force, imagine a better solution, a better way, a better world, and dedicate yourselves to making those imagined things a reality."

Read the address here

NATO Spokesperson Answers Questions of Bulgarian Journalists

On March 13, the U.S. Embassy organized a video-conference with Bulgarian journalists who had the opportunity to speak with NATO's spokesperson, James Appathurai. He answered a wide range of questions about the Bulgarian candidate for NATO Secretary-General, Solomon Passy, the Bulgarian contribution to the mission in Afghanistan, and the future of the Alliance. Ambassador McEldowney facilitated the event and said that the nomination of Passy is an example of the active participation of Bulgaria and its contribution to the Alliance.

Ambassador Steven Mann Addresses Energy Issues on Bulgarian National Television

Popular political talk show Panorama aired an interview with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Steven Mann on Friday, March 13, featuring topics related to the gas crisis that struck Europe in January, the necessity of a common energy policy by European nations, and the new U.S. administration's approach toward the energy issue. Ambassador Mann pointed out that the United States conducts a consistent and anti-monopolist policy and that the recent gas crisis had shown that Europe needs diversification and a common policy on energy security.

Ambassador McEldowney Engages in Lively Discussions with Prominent Bulgarian Bloggers

On March 25, Ambassador McEldowney met with prominent Bulgarian bloggers and shared her ideas on the role of bloggers in society. The Ambassador talked about the importance the Embassy places on reaching out to people through the means of new media, and shared her experience in blogging and social networking. The bloggers offered personal insights on the Bulgarian online media, the influence of the blogs and social networks, the challenges that Bulgaria is facing in the run-up to the National Elections, and their vision about Bulgaria's future. Overall, the exchange of ideas was mutually educational as everyone realized the growing popularity of blogging as a serious form of communications that is accessible to virtually anyone who uses the internet.

In the News

Webchat with Consul General Dan Perrone

Consul General Dan Perrone hosted a webchat to discuss visas and other consular issues on March 10. Fifty people participated in the one-hour event, in which the Consul General discussed the summer work and travel program and the importance of the biometric passport, as well as offered advice and information about specific cases for interested participants.

Read a transcript of the webchat .

Pulitzer Prize Winner Talks about Google in a Video Conference

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and writer David Vise chatted with more than 45 publishers, students, and journalists at the U.S. Embassy in Sofia on Wednesday, March 18. Speaking through a digital videoconference from Washington, DC, Vise captivated the audience for more than one hour with fascinating tidbits from his national bestseller *The Google Story*. The book, which has already been published in more than two dozen languages, was recently printed in Bulgarian. David Vise said that the story of Google was not about making money; it was about solving a problem – how to find information on the internet – which Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin did with flying colors.

Ambassador McEldowney Opens the First Curves Club in Bulgaria

Ambassador Nancy McEldowney opened on March 5 the first Bulgarian franchise of Curves, the largest fitness franchise in the world, with over 10,000 locations in 60 countries. Curves is the first fitness and weight loss facility designed for women, which combines exercise and nutrition into one program. Ambassador McEldowney and Curves' Area Development Director for Bulgaria, Raul Nelson, cut the ribbon of the chain's first facility in Bulgaria and spoke with great enthusiasm about Curves' contribution not only to women's health but also to charitable causes like the fight against breast cancer. In her brief remarks, Ambassador McEldowney noted the significance of the opening of Curves on the eve of the International Women's Day and expressed her confidence that Curves will help Bulgaria's women to become "healthier, stronger, and more beautiful."

State Alum Speaks to English Teachers

In March, the Embassy organized a workshop for English Language teachers from the district and city of Sofia. As part of the program, Pavlina Zarcheva-Tzankova, one of Bulgaria's alumni from the 2008 Study of the United States Summer Institute for Secondary Educators, delivered a presentation about the program to a group of English language teachers. In her address, Pavlina highlighted the main elements of the program and the benefits she realized through her participation – both as a professional and to her institution.

In the Spotlight

A Fulbright Artist

Angela Rodel has been living in Bulgaria since 2005. She is a Fulbright Alum, a musician, and ethno-musicologist by profession. As a student at Yale University, she joined the Yale Slavic Chorus, where she heard for the first time the "Mystery of Bulgarian Voices" choir. Most recently she played the leading role in the Bulgarian film *The Goat* by director Georgi Dyulgerov, which opened the 13th edition of Sofia International Film Festival.

Mediation Techniques Promoted by a State Department Programs Alum

Evgeni Georgiev, alum of the Ron Brown Scholarship Program, studied law at Tulane School of Law and also interned for the Honorable Sarah Vance, Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court, E.D., New Orleans, LA in 2002–2003. Later, he studied at Georgetown Law Center as an ECESP Fellow and interned at the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C. In recent years Evgeni Georgiev has devoted his time and energy to promote the use of mediation techniques during court civil proceedings. As a result of his and his colleagues efforts, Sofia Trial Court, the Professional Association of Mediators in Bulgaria, the European Judicial Association for Mediation, and the Fulbright Commission, with the support of the National Institute of Justice, are implementing a project funded by the Bulgaria Fund to provide mediation training for 15 Bulgarian Trial Court judges by two outstanding Harvard experts – Mrs. Gabrielle Gropman and Mr. James Kerwin.

A Peace Corps Volunteer Saves Birds in Bulgaria

Beth Wieland is a Peace Corps Volunteer residing in the northern part of Bulgaria. Beth is a Community and Organizational Development Volunteer with the Danube regional office of the Bulgarian Society of the Protection of Birds (BSPB). Together with her counterparts, she works on a USAID Small Project Assistance project to upgrade the media capacity of BSPB. Separately, Beth visits a different English class every day of the week along with teachers in a local school to help with speaking and pronunciation.

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The U.S. Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria is accepting applications for the 2010 Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA)

TEA will provide 156 secondary school teachers from Europe and Eurasia, East Asia and the Pacific, the Near East, South and Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Western Hemisphere with unique opportunities to develop expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills, and increase their knowledge about the United States. Their program will include coursework and intensive training in teaching methodologies, lesson planning, and teaching strategies for the participants' home environment, as well as the use of computers for Internet, word processing, and as teaching tools.

The deadline for sending applications is April 27, 2009. **(application materials PDF)**

If you would like to complete the form electronically, please contact the Embassy for an editable copy of the application form at: PA_USEmbassySofia@state.gov

Upcoming Events:

April 9, 16:00: Webchat with Katherine Ingmanson, Public Affairs Officer

Please Note:

April 20: The U.S. Embassy will be closed for Easter Holidays.

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