

Energy Projects in Our Country Closely Scrutinized by the U.S.A.

by Kudrinka Kudrinova

U.S.A. Ambassador Nancy McEldowney brought to Sofia Peter Eigen, founder of Transparency International and President of EITI who is to make transparent the agreements on energy transit

“The future of energy production and use in Bulgaria, as well as in the whole of Europe, requires more transparency in the decision making for the provision of energy transit. That is why I am very glad that the world authority Peter Eigen, President of the Directors' Board of EITI and founder of Transparency International managed to attend the end of April Energy Forum in Sofia at our invitation. We worked together with the Bulgarian government to set up a program with the participation of EITI. We hope that EITI will have presence in your country and will bring for bigger transparency in the transit of energy. This transparency will be important for Bulgaria, for the Bulgarian economy and for the Bulgarian citizens.”

These are words of Her Excellency Nancy McEldowney, U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria. She said this for “Tema” when “Tema” asked her to talk about her promotion to a high post, to a key post in the American foreign policy. As announced even before a year of her Sofia mandate passed, Ambassador McEldowney is to be Principal Deputy Secretary of State at the Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs to the Department of State.

The minutes before the security check at the entrance of the Lozenetz Embassy compound and the meeting at the Ambassador's office brought surprise to our team. The press attaché Vincent Campos and his colleagues invited us to walk around part of the building, housing the diplomatic mission. The intention definitely was **to do away with the stereotype about American embassies** as fortresses, closed and inaccessible to outsiders. The wish to synchronize with the refrain of the American President Barak Obama for change and openness in all fields of American policy also was obvious.

We walked around halls and lobbies, decorated with spectacular pictures by American and Bulgarian artists. We were taken to the other side of the visa counters. We briefly looked into the joyful and spacious multicolor room which is used as a day care for little Americans and little Bulgarians – kids of American and Bulgarian Embassy employees play there together. We visited the fitness center for the personnel which is an excellent facility. We were told about the efforts of an installation engineer whose innovations saved about \$40,000 to the compound.

This introduction made for an informal and spontaneous beginning of our discussion with Ambassador McEldowney, who met us warmly in person in her big reception hall and then took us to her office which has a splendid view of Vitosha. There, displayed on the wall in a prominent place, are unique stamps of Byzantine times, used to mark bread. This collection, which leads to the ancient roots of the culture in Bulgarian lands, is a source of pride to the Embassy.

The Ambassador speaks with deep piety about Bulgarian culture. She has been moved mostly by the universal language of music. She admires our folklore, our opera, our ballet and even our rappers... But her most unforgettable experience was from a concert at the Alexander Nevski crypt, performed by “Yulangelo” formation, a male choir.

Another Bulgarian magic to Ambassador McEldowney and her family is our nature. Favorite pastime for the lady diplomat, her husband Tim Hayes, ex pilot of the American airforce and of their two little daughters – Alyssa, who is 3, and Jessica, who is 9, is **hiking about our mountains**.

They have been fascinated by the seven Rila lakes and by our monasteries – most of all by Rila Monastery, of course. The girls can not reach agreement which park is their favorite – Zaimov, Borossova Garden or Doctors Garden. The two kids have friends in all of the three places. Little Alyssa speaks the best Bulgarian in the family; she enthusiastically greets even strangers on the street with “Zdraveite” and “Dobur den”.

“We all will miss Bulgaria very much. Here we felt at home”, said Ambassador McEldowney.

The summing up of her year as the Ambassador of the U.S.A. puts a stress on the strategic partnership between our two countries, built up in the 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the start of the changes in Bulgaria. “Twenty years are a lot for human life, though not for history. But look how much was accomplished bilaterally for this comparatively short period. From being rivals in the Cold War we reached a very different type of relations, with the U.S.A. becoming an advocate and a supporter of the changes in Bulgaria. We went further, with Bulgaria being integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures, and now we are in the stage when Bulgaria has become a real friend and ally of the U.S.A. My goal is that projects, on which I spent the last year, are still helpful some day, in 20 years from now, so that when people look back, they could say: Yes, **this partnership was useful** and brought about the prosperity of Bulgaria”.

Here is how Ambassador McEldowney classifies the accents in the bilateral contacts: “American-Bulgarian relations at the moment are the best for a long period. The basic elements in them are our common view as to the direction in which we are moving and what we want to achieve; our common values, for example strengthening of democracy, human rights and freedoms, and supremacy of the law; our shared will for joint action.”

The example she gives is the partnership within the range of NATO, in which Bulgaria has proved to be a “highly esteemed and reliable partner” , the military presence in Iraq, where Bulgarian participation is over and the mission in Afghanistan, where our country is to widen its engagement. The Ambassador also reminded us that the U.S.A. have supported and will continue to support the military reform in Bulgaria and several joint Bulgarian-American military exercises have been carried out.

Dwelling on the commercial relations Her Excellency Nancy McEldowney points out that the biggest direct foreign investor in Bulgaria is the U.S.A. through the AES Company, which has been building “Maritza Iztok – 1” since 2006, using the latest in technology and in concordance with the ecology requirements of the EU. On the whole the U.S.A. are among the first ten countries, which have invested capital in Bulgaria.

The Ambassador outlines especially the new initiative in the joint activities with the Bulgarian government in the field of international development: “We started a unique program in Bulgaria for the creation of partnership between Government and private entities. We were honored in this respect by the visit to Bulgaria of Mr. Jimmy Wales, the creator of Wikipedia. We hope that this program will help economic development in the field of information technologies and will also improve communications, and increase the scope of transparency”.

Transparency is also major goal for the other key initiative which has already been mentioned in the beginning – the start of discussions with the Bulgarian government concerning the idea, presented by

Peter Eigen, for keeping the public informed about the requirements for the transit of energy through Bulgaria.

The energy topic is especially close to Ambassador McEldowney. "I have often been asked if I am for or against the Nabucco project, or if I am against the Southern Stream project. The answer I always give is that I am **for the Bulgarian national interest**. Let us not forget what is widely known – 70% of all supplies for Bulgaria and over 90% of the gas supply come from one place – from Russia. It is always that when there is a monopoly in a country, especially in the key sector of energy, that the country is vulnerable. Decades ago Winston Churchill spoke on the subject saying that there are three secrets when one wants to guarantee the sustainability of energy supplies, namely: diversification, diversification and diversification. Bulgaria learnt this lesson in January at the time of the then gas crisis. I am not against Southern Stream as a project per se, but if it remains the only project for Bulgaria, Bulgaria will be vulnerable. Nabucco provides an alternative. Of course all these projects are very complex, they presuppose entering into agreements between governments and need substantial financing. That is why it is so crucial to have bigger transparency in the process so that people can understand what important decisions have been made and why they have been made ."

Regarding the outcome of the raging world economic crisis Ambassador McEldowney is an optimist. "I believe that both the U.S.A. and Bulgaria will overcome the crisis. We must come out of it more knowing and stronger, to learn the lessons which it provides for making the necessary decisions and to take the necessary measures, which should have been made and taken long ago. The so called encouraging economic plan in the U.S.A. has been used not only for the creation of new workplaces, but also for the progress in various sectors as in the energy sector, information technologies and education – for the progress of the economy as a whole. I have said it and I have encouraged Bulgaria to use the same method, consistent with its current situation. Namely, to become most attractive for foreign investment and at the same time **to minimize corruption** which erodes not only the economy itself but also the whole of society."

According to Her Excellency Nancy McEldowney fighting corruption will be a big challenge for the Bulgarian government which will be constituted after the 5th of July elections: "The citizens of Bulgaria are expecting evident results in this aspect. The new government will have to set up a specific plan with fixed time frame and to carry out its engagements. It will also have to handle the issue of supervision of the implementation of EU funds and also to hold the judiciary accountable for resolving the still outstanding cases of embezzlement and mismanagement of EU funds."

It is very important for the American Ambassador that "Bulgarian citizens hold the Bulgarian government responsible". She emphasizes that the approaching national holiday of her country – the 4th of July – is a cause not only for celebration but also for reminding the basic principles which served as foundation for the building up of the United States. One of the keys is tied to the rights of every citizen, including the right to elect the government but also the right to hold the government responsible for performing its duties. "It is exactly this we have in mind when we say that our government is of the people, elected by the people and of service to the people", said Ambassador McEldowney. She is convinced that "Bulgarians are intelligent, strong, warm and that they will overcome the hardships on the course of Bulgaria.