



## Upcoming Events

**December 24:** Embassy Closed for Christmas Eve

**December 25:** Embassy Closed for Christmas

**December 26:** Embassy Closed for Day After Christmas

**January 1:** Embassy Closed for New Year's Day



The U. S. Department of State is sponsoring the "Doors to Diplomacy" educational challenge - to encourage middle school and high school students around the world to produce web projects that teach others about the importance of international affairs and diplomacy. [see Embassy website for more information](http://bulgaria.usembassy.gov)

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## Letter from Ambassador John Beyrle



Dear Friends,

I want to start off by sending my very best wishes to all of you for a happy holiday season spent close to loved ones and friends, and a New Year filled with good health and good fortune.

Many of you probably saw in the press some recent comments of mine on problems of corruption and organized crime in Bulgaria. And then came some comments on my comments! So I would like to share with you some of my thoughts about these problems, why the United States is so concerned, and what I think is the key to success in fighting them.

Crime and corruption in Bulgaria often have a direct impact upon the United States and upon our bilateral relations. They sometimes hinder American companies already working in Bulgaria, and they deter American companies that would like to invest here.

In a globalized world, organized crime knows no borders, and organized crime organizations in Bulgaria have connections with organized crime in other Balkan countries, Europe and Eurasia, and the United States. Laundered money flows across borders out of Bulgaria. Bulgaria loses millions of leva of tax revenue that could be used to address urgent social needs.

America wants to see Bulgaria become a prosperous and thriving democracy within the EU, providing jobs, security, dignity and opportunity to all its citizens. Crime and corruption make Bulgaria a weaker country – and we need strong partners and allies. This is why we're so engaged with Bulgaria to help solve this problem.

In the last fifteen years the United States has invested more than 60 million dollars to train Bulgarian prosecutors and judges to fight organized crime more effectively, and to help Bulgaria modernize its judicial system. We helped found the National Institute of Justice in Bulgaria, to help Bulgarian legal officials to learn state-of-the-art European and American techniques. Our FBI, Secret Service and Justice Department have offices in Bulgaria, and we work closely with Bulgarian law enforcement to solve cases that affect both our countries.

Our Consulate also plays a part – we have a policy of refusing visas to anyone we have reason to believe has been involved in organized crime or has benefited from the proceeds of criminal activity.

But in the end, of course, success in the fight against organized crime and corruption in Bulgaria does not depend on speeches by the American Ambassador, or U.S. assistance programs – it depends above all upon the courage and will of the Bulgarian government, parliament, press and individual citizens.

We fought our own battle against organized crime in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. It involved not just our police and courts, but members of Congress, journalists, trade union leaders, and many courageous individuals who stood up and said, "That's enough, we have to root out the networks of organized crime." It took many years, but it worked.

We still have organized crime and corruption in America, but its power has been drastically reduced from what it once was, and it is forced to operate from the shadows. Today, if a judge, Congressman, or any public figure takes bribes, chances are very high that he will be caught and serve a long jail sentence.

This is what I hope to see happen in Bulgaria as well – that journalists, political leaders, business people, and ordinary citizens will stand together and say – enough – Bulgaria has to put an end to impunity for organized crime figures, and the protected status of duty-free shops, and other activities that break the law and take money away from public needs.

Yes, for this to happen requires a strong judicial system, clean and competent law enforcement, and steady political will on the part of elected officials. But in a democracy, these things just do not happen if they are not demanded by the people.

Attached below is a summary sampling of some of the events that the Embassy took part in over the past month. Again, best wishes of the season to one and all.

*John Beyrle*

## In the News

### Deputy Assistant Secretary Matthew Bryza Addresses Energy Security Issues in Sofia



Deputy Assistant Secretary Matthew Bryza reiterates his views on energy security at a roundtable sponsored by the Center for the Study of Democracy

Matthew Bryza, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, discussed Energy Security: Diversification and Dependence of Sources at a roundtable held on Friday, December 7, at the Central Military Club in Sofia. Mr. Bryza addressed the issue of energy security by saying that from a geopolitical perspective, the most urgent question of all is the reliable supply of natural gas.

He said that U.S. policy is to encourage competition and to put Bulgaria and our other allies in the strongest possible negotiating position. Mr. Bryza pointed out that the question is purely strategic – it's in America's best national interest to have Europe's market function efficiently and for our allies to feel strong and secure, knowing they have safe and diversified supplies of energy.

### Bulgaria, U.S. Discuss Kosovo's Future

After his meeting with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ivaylo Kalfin on December 5, Ambassador Frank Wisner, U.S. envoy to the Troika process, took questions from Bulgarian media. Although the Troika left no stone unturned in what was a very intense dialogue between the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo, he said, the two sides couldn't find common ground.

Ambassador Wisner said that the status quo in Kosovo could not be sustained: a political decision should be made, and Kosovo's final status should be resolved. Ambassador Wisner reiterated the U.S. Administration's position that the Ahtisaari plan remains on the table and deserves to be implemented and acted on.



After their meeting, Ambassador Frank Wisner and Foreign Minister Ivaylo Kalfin speak about Kosovo's status

### Success in Afghanistan is Vital for NATO Alliance



Ambassador Beyrle speaks at the conference on Afghanistan while the rest of the panel looks on

Ambassador John Beyrle, Deputy Defense Minister Sonya Yankulova, Deputy Foreign Ministers Feim Chaushev and Milen Keremedchiev, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bulgarian Parliament Solomon Passy, and the Ambassador of Afghanistan to Bulgaria, Zahida Ansary, all delivered a similar message to a conference on NATO and

Afghanistan, taking place in Sofia on November 29-30: that success in Afghanistan is vital to the success of the NATO alliance. Ambassador Beyrle summarized why Afghanistan is important to Bulgaria - it is vital, he said, in the fight against terrorism, drugs, and for the overall security of Europe. ([Ambassador Beyrle's Remarks at the Conference](#))

### Ambassador Beyrle on bTV Morning Show

On Wednesday, November 14, Ambassador Beyrle took part in the bTV Morning Show, where he addressed issues concerning Bulgaria's democratic development, rule of law and corruption, and visa regulations. The Ambassador said that Washington regards Bulgaria as a stable democracy. At the same time, he said, phenomena like vote buying and continued links between the gray economy and politics are unacceptable, and are clearly viewed

as such by Bulgarian citizens and the media. In response to a question, Ambassador Beyrle said that the large number of Bulgarians who overstay their visitor's visas in the United States is still an obstacle preventing Bulgaria from qualifying for visa-free status for the next several years. ([Transcript of the interview](#)) (See video [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#) in Bulgarian only)



Ambassador Beyrle, during his interview on the bTV morning show

## Issues

### Commemorating the 16 Days of International Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women



The 16 Days of International Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is an opportunity to renew our commitment to prevent violence against women and to assist those who suffer from its devastating effects. I am honored to commemorate this important occasion.

The United States takes a strong stand against violence against women at home and around the world because we believe in human dignity. We believe that the dignity and integrity of every person, regardless of gender, must always be respected and protected. ([Statement from Ambassador John Beyrle](#))

### Spotlight on Alumni



**Nedyalka Popova**

Nedyalka ("Nelly") Georgieva Popova is a prosecutor from Pazardjik and one of Bulgaria's most accomplished prosecutors in human trafficking cases. In 2005, she participated with other Bulgarian experts in human trafficking issues in an International Visitors Program sponsored by the Department of State, where she traveled to New York and Washington to exchange views and best practices with American anti-trafficking experts.

Ms. Popova has successfully prosecuted a number of cases involving both human trafficking and enticement into prostitution and has been in the forefront in developing new methods of evidence collection and approaches to working with trafficking victims. In the past, the Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training has asked Nelly to share her expertise with fellow law enforcement officials from around Bulgaria at its human trafficking workshops. In one of her latest cases, an investigation prompted by a media report resulted in the conviction of the two traffickers exposed by the journalists. On December 13, the U.S. Embassy awarded her a Certificate of Appreciation to honor her efforts to combat this problem.

### Ambassador Beyrle Speaks in Burgas about the Joint Military Facilities

On November 16, Ambassador Beyrle spoke about the joint Bulgarian - U.S. military facilities at a public information forum held at the Burgas Free University. Deputy Defense Minister Sonya Yankulova also participated in the event.

The forum was part of a series of events around Bulgaria aimed at sharing information about future joint military training, potential business opportunities, and the importance of the bilateral relationship between Bulgaria and the United States.



Ambassador Beyrle greets Deputy Defense Minister Sonya Yankulova shortly before the public forum at Burgas Free University

### Bulgarian Poet Aziz Shakir-Tash Reads at the Library of Congress



Bulgarian poet Aziz Shakir-Tash reads from his works as part of a ceremony at the Library of Congress

Bulgarian writer Aziz Shakir-Tash received quite an honor recently - the invitation to read from his recent works at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. on November 15, 2007. Shakir-Tash has been in the U.S. for the past three months, taking part in the distinguished International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. Shakir-Tash won this special scholarship to attend the program, financed entirely by the American people, out of a pool of 57 nominees from all around the world.

Mr. Shakir-Tash is a talented poet, fiction writer and translator who works in Arabic, Turkish and English both as a scholar and as a writer. He has published 3 books of poetry, most recently "A Sky at 33" (2007) and one collection of short stories, "Rain Apocrypha" (2004). Four additional writers - from Argentina, Syria, India and Montenegro - also took part in the Library of Congress reading.

## In the Community

### New American Shelf in Burgas Regional Library



After opening the new American Shelf, Ambassador Beyrle signed one of the books at the request of Library Director Natalia Kotseva

Ambassador Beyrle visited the Pencho Slavejkov Regional Library in Burgas on November 16 to donate a collection of American reference books and a computer workstation. The donation, with a value of \$4,000, is the fifth such collection to go to

a Bulgarian library as part of the American Shelves program of the U.S. Embassy, which focuses on improving access to information about American history, culture, society and values.

### U.S. Donates Equipment for Bulgarian Civil Protection Teams

Deputy Chief of Mission Alexander Karagiannis and USAID Mission Director Michael Fritz presented a donation of radio communication equipment and chainsaws to the Ministry of State Policy for Disasters and Accidents in a December 5 ceremony in Sofia. The equipment will enhance the efficiency of the Bulgarian Civil Protection Teams in responding to future wildfires.

The assistance, worth \$50,000, was provided in response to the Ministry's request when wildfires struck areas of Bulgaria in the summer of 2007. Deputy Minister Valeri Nikolov accepted the contribution on behalf of the Ministry and expressed appreciation for the assistance provided by the U.S. Government.



Deputy Chief of Mission Alexander Karagiannis holds one of the chainsaws donated by the U.S. government

### U.S. Diplomats Meet with Students Throughout Bulgaria



Cultural Attaché Anthony Miranda answers a question about stereotypes of the United States during his conversation with students from the Foreign Language School in Stara Zagora

Members of the Embassy community criss-crossed Bulgaria to speak with students all around the country. Cultural Attaché Anthony Miranda spoke at the official opening of a Debate Club at the Foreign Language School in Montana on November 8 and followed that event up

with a discussion on stereotypes of America in a conversation with students of the Foreign Language School in Vratsa. Later in the month, he visited the Foreign Language Schools in Stara Zagora and Dimitrovgrad.

USAID Project Development Officer Tamika Cameron met with Bulgarian high school students at the regional libraries of Targovishte, Shumen, and Razgrad to discuss U.S. society and values from November 26 – 28. Consul General Dan Perrone visited Smolyan on November 27, where he met with students of the local branch

of the University of Plovdiv to discuss the ever-popular J-1 Summer Work & Travel program, and Political Officer Kim Hawk traveled to the Foreign Language School in Pernik on November 28 to talk about American Women of Influence.



USAID Project Development Officer Tamika Cameron shares a laugh and some snacks with students in Targovishte