ANCIENT SERDICA REVIVED IN SOFIA’S CITY CENTRE

UKRAINE CRISIS “LANDS” IN BULGARIA

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE EGG

SOFIA DESERVES TO BE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Interview with Sofia Mayor Mrs. Yordanka Fandakova

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Sofia deserves to be European Capital of Culture

The Ludogorets phenomenon – from third division to round of 16 in Europa League

12 girls present 12 churches in Kyustendil

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Welcome to underground Serdica

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The crisis in Ukraine has not stopped eliciting a controversial response from across the world. In Sofia, positions on the conflict were not unanimous, either.

On 16 March, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea voted in a referendum with a clear outcome and dangerous consequences. Close to 95.5% of voters there backed accession to the Russian Federation. Russia and Crimea signed an interstate agreement for the accession of the republic to the Russian Federation. Russia and Crimea signed an interstate agreement for the accession of the republic to the Russian Federation. In an exclusive address to the Russian parliament, President Vladimir Putin said that Crimea had been and would continue to be a Russian territory. Ukraine and the West termed the referendum, held amid the Russian occupation, anti-constitutional and illegitimate.

The European Union has not recognized and shall not recognize Crimea and Sevastopol’s annexation by the Russian Federation, the presidents of the European Commission and the European Council said in a joint statement. The European Union, however, has decided not to impose trade and economic sanctions on Russia. EU and Kiev have signed a political agreement on accession.

**What about the Bulgarian position?**

During his visit to the United Kingdom, Bulgarian President Rossen Plevneliev called for a tougher EU policy towards Russia in the wake of Crimea’s annexation. At the European Council in Brussels however, Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski stated that Bulgaria would not support large-scale sanctions on Russia without a clear picture of what their impact could be. In the meantime, he did not rule out the option of Bulgaria vetoing severe economic EU sanctions on Russia.

The Advisory Council on National Security with President Rossen Plevneliev convened for an extraordinary meeting and ruled that „Bulgaria acts in its capacity of EU and NATO member; accounting for its national interest and working to the benefit of a single EU position on Ukraine. The Republic of Bulgaria supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The referendum held on 16 March in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea violates international law and the Constitution of Ukraine and the Republic of Bulgaria does not recognize its results.”

**Economic impact of the crisis for Bulgaria**

Besides energy dependence on natural gas supplies, worries in Bulgaria have to do with a feared decline in the number of organized tourists from Russia and Ukraine. Against the backdrop of close to a 14% growth in the number of Ukrainian holiday-makers last year, the sector is worried about the summer season. More than 200,000 Ukrainians visit Bulgaria annually. Ukraine is a transit country for many Russians, and tensions have come as a threat to both individual trips and organized bus transfers. Furthermore, the sector has fears over possible anti-Russia sanctions by the EU linked to the visa regime that could restrict Russian tourists’ access to Bulgaria.
Crimea used to be part of Old Great Bulgaria

by Tanya Harizanova

The Bulgarian Mecca – the most sacred place for all Bulgarians is to be found in Ukraine. It is the grave of Khan Kubrat – the only grave of a Bulgarian ruler that has been fully proven and is undisputed. More than 1,350 years ago, the Khan realized that Unity Makes Strength. This has been engraved on the black marble slab on his mound. And further down: Kubrat the Great, placed by God, ruler of Old Great Bulgaria. The capital of the ancient state can be found next to Crimea – Phanagoria. So, in fact Crimea is part of the Bulgarian historical homeland. More than 300 proto-Bulgarian settlements blossomed on the peninsula in the period from the 7th to 10th century AD. There were many Bulgarian migrations over the centuries. Nowadays, three Crimean regions use primarily the Bulgarian language.

“The place used to be part of Khan Kubrat’s Old Great Bulgaria as early as the 7th century,” says Prof. Nikolay Ovcharov. “When the country fell apart under the raids of the Khazars, one of the sons – Khan Asparukh, established Danube Bulgaria; the second son – Khan Kotrag established Volga Bulgaria, while the rest of the lands were ruled by the first son – Batbayan. Ukrainian scholars from Crimea talk about some 300 Bulgarian settlements that existed in the same period. The second Bulgarian connection comes later, during the 19th century, when there were quite serious migrations of Bulgarians to the Crimean Peninsula. Later those people met an unhappy fate after the October Revolution, as they were mostly well-to-do, which was the reason they were deported to Siberia.”

Under Stalin, Bulgarians were deported to Siberia and Central Asia. In 1944, following an order by Beria, the Russian authorities deported about 13,000 out of Crimea over just a few hours. The reason was that, officially, Bulgaria was an ally of Germany during WWII. The Bulgarian community was scattered over six locations, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Thus whole Bulgarian villages ceased to exist. Nowadays Bulgarians live mainly in the cities Simferopol, Sudak and Koktebel. One of the old Bulgarian fortresses can be found in Sudak. Prof. Ovcharov explains that the first Bulgarian fortresses were built as early as the 7th century by the proto-Bulgarians.

“According to Ukrainian archaeologists, there was a proto-Bulgarian settlement on this very spot. Signs cut in stone testify to this and they are identical to the ones discovered in the capitals of the First Bulgarian Kingdom – Pliska and Preslav. Identical ceramic utensils have been found, too. This is the Saltovo-Mayaki culture from the 7th to the 9th century AD, which carried the traditions of Old Great Bulgaria.”

Some sources say the town of Phanagoria near Crimea used to be the capital of Old Great Bulgaria in the period 632 – 668 AD. In the 10th century, the town was conquered by Kievan Rus’ and was never restored again. As far as the grave of Khan Kubrat is concerned, it was discovered by accident by two young shepherds from the village of Malaya Pereshchepina in 1912. The two stumbled upon a treasure of gold and silver, weighing 70 kg. Today it can be seen at the Hermitage. Christian symbols can be seen on the rings, the sword and the sceptre of Kubrat. The gold buckle shows that Kubrat used to have a patrician title, as engraved on the ring. Kubrat had been baptized during his studies in Constantinople.
Freedom of movement is the fundamental right of EU citizens. However, with the upcoming European elections in May 2014, the debate on the poor migrants from Eastern Europe was restarted. The issue has resurfaced in Bulgaria too with the refugee wave from Syria. The issue was discussed in Sofia at a Bulgarian-German forum entitled “Migration models in the EU – challenges facing Bulgaria and Germany”. Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Deputy PM Daniela Bobeva, as well as Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, Member of the European Parliament with the Free Democratic Party of Germany, part of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, took part in the discussion. Both agreed that migration actually helped EU Member States. The big problem with the integration of the Roma community should be solved with the efforts of all EU Members. According to statistics, 90% of the Bulgarians who go to work in Germany are young people who study there and are integrated quickly. Compact groups of Roma who do not speak the language and are looking only to exploit the social systems of countries are below 5 percent. Experts say that there is no brain drain to speak of in Bulgaria as there was after the democratic changes in 1989 when 11.5 percent of Bulgarian scientists, engineers and experts left the country. Today mostly young people go to study in Germany, Ms. Bobeva says. She pointed out that a program for online internships aims attracting these students back to Bulgaria in order to balance the lack of highly qualified experts. Migration is not harmful to Bulgaria, nor England or other EU Members, she said, adding: “The expected wave of immigrants to the UK did not take place and we knew that. Still, such campaigns trigger negative attitudes towards Bulgarians, who are actually integrated quite well”, Minister Bobeva contends. “I hope that communications and statistics will show the truth. We see that recipient countries are interested in attracting experts. Still, each EU citizen has the right to move freely and work in the union. Balance is needed as every citizen has equal rights. Our German colleagues pointed out that the Roma issue was not a problem for a particular region or a country. It is a problem for the whole of Europe that must be solved with joint efforts.”

Associate Professor Krasen Stanchev who is the founder of the Institute for Market Economy in Bulgaria also says migration is not harmful to Europe. “I don’t think emigration is a problem. The whole debate was created artificially. Migration is good for donor countries as well as for recipient countries. There are no economic data that show this is a problem. High poverty levels do not mean emigration. The highest level of emigration from Bulgaria to EU Member States coincided with a period of a swift reduction of poverty after 2001. When we talk about brain drain, we should know that this is a matter of free choice of people who look for better prospects. These people are trying to invest more in their education and skills. If we want more educated Bulgarians, we should let them choose what they want to study. Nowadays many Bulgarians go to western countries but the process can be described as a “movement of workforce”. These experts will sooner or later return to Bulgaria. Many of these people send money to their families at home, so this is also a good thing.”

What about the problem with Roma integration in the EU? “It is better for governments not to adopt policies targeting a specific group of people, as this causes discrimination. Policies targeting Roma minority are being replaced with policies related to poverty migration, which include them, too. The problem is related to keeping the rule of law valid for everyone.”

Krassen Stanchev: Migration debate in Europe was created artificially

by Tanya Harizanova
Do you remember the likeable robot Wall-E who had the mission of cleaning up the Earth turned into a garbage dump by us, humans? Now it seems we are facing the risk of another apocalyptic scenario, though this time it is no cartoon or Hollywood blockbuster but something that is very real. Within a few years the space around our planet may well become cluttered with space junk. “Current data show there are around 650,000 objects orbiting the Earth, many of them from debris from derelict rockets and satellites,” said for Radio Bulgaria Ass. Prof. Alexey Stoev, Director of the Stara Zagora branch of the Space Research and Technology Institute.

If any of this space debris was to cross the orbit of a functioning satellite or space station it could cause serious damage. “Even a piece around 1 cm. in size moves at incredible speed and has such kinetic energy that a collision with a ship could be fatal,” this is how Ass. Prof. Stoev describes one of the most sinister possible scenarios. Disruptions in navigation, in radio communications and television, in the function of devices monitoring the Earth’s surface and the oceans are some of the possible problems. Bulgarian scientists, headed by Ass. Prof. Stoev are part of a major international consortium together with colleagues from Russia, France, Germany and USA.

“We will also take part in modeling this technogenic junk so as to find out what the chances are of its crossing the orbit of any of the major functioning satellite systems or of any satellites yet to be launched,” Alexey Stoev explains. “This is a very serious and highly-responsible task I hope we shall tackle it successfully, as we have plenty of experience in this sphere. Back in 1959 three artificial satellite monitoring stations were put up in Bulgaria and this surveillance continued right up to 1987. Now we are resuming our work, though this time we are using most modern surveillance technology and high-performance parallel processing computers capable of monitoring massive databases, some of them containing the coordinates of 300,000 – 400,000 objects. They must all be subjected to evolutionary development to see what will happen to them in the coming years owing to changes in the Earth’s atmosphere and to changes in solar activity. These will be our tasks.”

Part of the software will be developed by Bulgarian experts. The surveillance is expected to be launched at the end of summer and to add to the database. The project will cover ten years, but Ass. Prof Stoev says the Bulgarian team will continue their work afterwards because Bulgaria was among the first six countries in the world to have begun the monitoring of the first artificial satellites way back in 1959.

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**BULGARIANS HELP TACKLE SPACE JUNK PROBLEM**

by Rumyana Ivetkova
There is no doubt that the Bulgarian cuisine is rich in traditional and tasty meals. Ancient recipes are still preserved and used in villages across the country. Home-grown fruits and vegetables with a magnificent taste can be found in the gardens. However, if one decides to stay at a guest house and try a local meal, the answer to the question on the provenance of the products will be: “the local store”. This is due to the fact that Bulgarian small farmers do not have access to the retail chain store system or groceries. The Bulgarian branch of the Eurotoques association of European chefs has given its attention to this paradox for a long time.

What is the problem? Small farms hadn’t had the chance to sell directly to the market until 4 years ago and their goods used to reach it via resellers. The controversial regulation on direct supplies was adopted back in 2010 and it showed lots of shortcomings. To start with, it allowed to small farms to sell directly a mere 20–30 percent of raw milk, while the rest had to be handed to reselling organizations. Farmers just didn’t see the point of building their producing capacities for such a small share and so, barely 200 of them state they want to sell directly after the adoption of the regulation, 2/3 of them being beekeepers. This type of activity was stimulated most and the result is visible: a large variety of Bulgarian bee honey can be freely bought on the market here.

Should legislation be the same for big and for small farmers? No, because such legislation is strongly restrictive for small farmers and practically slowly kills them, experts say. There are options within the EU for a flexible implementation of the requirements, but Bulgaria hasn’t used these options until now. “How do we expect small farmers to fight competition on the market with a legislation that tolerates big producers only,” MEP Antonia Parvanova asks rhetorically. At the same time, the products of the small ones are sought after and can mean employment and sustainable growth for the depopulated Bulgarian villages. There is demand, there is an option for offers, but the legislation puts a barrier between small farmers and customers. The access of the former to financial resource should be significantly facilitated, as well.”

An amendment to this poor regulation is currently being discussed. Most of the administrative barriers are expected to be lifted and family farms to be supported to the maximum with direct sales. Thus, finally homemade milk, yogurt, cheeses, and honey can reach the customer directly in the farm itself or on the market. Small farms with 2-3 cows and a dozen sheep are envisaged to be able to sell their produce at separate stands, in order to avoid resellers and get a good price for their products. Requirements on the premises of production and safety for the foods will be less restrictive, too. Dairy farms will now have the right to sell up to 80 percent of their milk – raw or processed. Atila Sedefchev, who raises animals of rare local breeds, pays attention to an additional factor – personal contacts, which are now lost. “We always have a direct face-to-face contact between the customer and the small farmer. The customer can see the conditions, the person that sells the product and this is a kind of a guarantee that has been working for ages. We just need a slight legitimization of the process. Currently things are going in the direction of pure genocide. Let’s not forget that traditional foods are part not only of our national culture, but also of its security, its food security…”

In the words of Deputy Agriculture Minister Yavor Gechev, a total of 230 points for purchase of the farming produce, situated high in the mountain will be established. Stimuli are envisaged for restaurants that use fresh local agricultural products. The idea is being considered of adding green stars to their category for that. Products from the mountains will be stimulated, too. Of course, organic products can also expect to be facilitated in their direct access to the market.
Bulgarians are known as some of the best horticulturists in Europe and Bulgarian vegetables are exported to many countries because of their unique taste. Such are the Oxheart tomatoes or the fleshy red peppers for instance. Can we preserve these vegetables and grow them in times of severe market competition and the pursuit of higher yields and profits? “We have to!” contends Associate Professor Dr Dimitrina Kostova from the Maritsa Vegetable Crops Research Institute, part of the Bulgarian Agricultural Academy in Plovdiv (Central South Bulgaria). Recently Dimitrina Kostova won a prize in her capacity of director of studies of an EU project under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technology (2007-2013), aiming at exploiting better the research capacities in Europe and transforming scientific results into new products, processes and services in underdeveloped regions. The project is entitled EU-Balkan Vegetables, said for Radio Bulgaria Associate Professor Kostova. “Our goal was to create an internal Balkan network uniting people working in the horticulture field on our peninsula. Our institute became the center of that network. Colleagues from Macedonia, Serbia, Romania, Greece and Turkey attended our conferences in Bulgaria. We managed to launch a very good network. Conferences with many interesting discussions about the financing of the research bodies were held. The latter also focused on topical problems in horticulture and gardening as a whole, connected with plants’ nutrition and horticultural diseases. Moreover, we were included in the European Food Network.”

What are the main problems Bulgaria currently faces in this field? “Perhaps you would not be surprised that food quality is what matters most”, says Associate Professor Kostova. “The maximum yield of most crops has already been reached. However, quality is also a very important indicator. The focus of our project is on better-quality fruit, rich in antioxidants and resistant to many diseases which reduce the use of pesticides. This contributes a lot to a healthy diet.”

Which bio products have the potential to grow well in Bulgaria? “Our institute has a valuable genetic fund”, Associate Professor Kostova adds. “The vegetables were adapted to the Bulgarian conditions and possess a unique taste. We must preserve these vegetables, regardless of the high competition by the foreign varieties. The latter look great. They are also resistant to many diseases and are popular with their high yields. However, they do not taste good. For instance, we have many good tomato varieties and high-quality peppers. I hope we will start paying more attention to these vegetables, because they are very popular worldwide.”
Lazaritsa and Tsvetnisa
(or Saint Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday
Bulgarian style)  

by Albena Bezovska

Though an integral part of the cycle of several major Christian feasts, the folklore celebrations of Lazaritsa (equivalent of Saint Lazarus Saturday) and Tsvetnitsa (equivalent of Palm Sunday) are distinctly Bulgarian. They represent a eulogy of resurrected nature, of youth and the hope for a new beginning. They are held with the same degree of optimism today as well, though diversified with a range of contemporary inputs. How Lazarki girls dress, what is laid on the table… We revisit the tradition and make sure that we are surrounded with verdure, colour and cleanness – in every sense of these words.

Lazaritsa precedes Easter and is held on the Saturday that Orthodox Christians relate to one of the wonders worked by Jesus Christ – the resurrection of Lazarus. The folklore ritual has a very different meaning though its name does refer to Lazarus. In the Bulgarian mythology, he is “the master of woods and leafage”. He has got an axe in his hand and tills people’s fields. This mythical champion of goodness personifying the borderline between earthly existence and the yonder world, is central to the ritual songs and dances of the Lazarki girls. Similar to the Koledari (the male Christmas carol-singers), they chant blessings for health
and fertility. There are blessings offered to hosts, to girls and lads, to brides and children… The Lazarki girls tour all houses in the village and everywhere their hosts give them white eggs and coins. Drawing a symbolical circle, the end of the tour ultimately brings them to the starting point.

On the next day, Tsvetnitsa (Palm Sunday), the ritual of “koumichene” is performed. Young girls gather by the river outside the village where water runs smoothly. They carry the so-called “dolls” – elongated ritual loaves of bread. Small bits of bread are placed on battledores which girls let go floating on the water. The girl whose bit of bread wins the race will marry first. In traditional beliefs, a girl who has been a Lazarka girl and has gone through the ritual of “koumichene” shall not be taken away by a dragon. In the past, it was impossible for girls to marry had they not been part of the Lazaritsa tradition, simply because the dragon would come to abduct them after they had become brides. Initiation was mandatory, and only after that would the girl be allowed to wear a wreath and flowers in her head; dress in embroidered shirts, wear jewels such as a necklace, earrings, rings and bracelets.

Vrabinitsa (Willow Day) is the other name of the traditional feast of Tsvetnitsa. With willow twigs Christians and Catholics have replaced palm branches involved in the welcoming of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem a week before His crucifixion. The willow has bivalent symbolism in the Bulgarian tradition and its twigs are blessed in church on Palm Sunday to bring health and protect the family. Today too, we attach willow twigs to icons and doors, and churches are crowded on that feast.

Some choose to go to church only on that great day. Priests store hundreds of willow twigs and give them out, blessing the faithful. If you choose to make a trip to the Bulgarian countryside on Tsvetnitsa, you will for sure come across Lazarki girls somewhere. Clad in colorful folk costumes, the teenage girls tour the houses of the community. Well, it could be that one or two of them might wear snickers under their embroidered shirts and the shirts might be larger than their size. Well, at least all of them readily sing and dance in street processions. Do not miss the chance of giving them a small gift. This act is believed to bring health and good luck to you!
The knack of transforming every tradition is a hallmark in Bulgaria that has given rise to a number of Easter rituals. In our lands, religious feasts have never fully replaced the colourful pagan rituals for welcoming spring. Some of them have come down to us in all of their authenticity, but most have been “Christianized” without altering their meaning. The biggest feast in Christian Orthodoxy, Easter, invariably brings with it the tradition of painted eggs. As in so many other things, here too the imagination of Bulgarian women does wonders.

In the mythology of many nations eggs are the symbol of eternal life. From the golden egg, symbol of the Sun, the world was born. A symbol of immortality, its shell conceals the magic power of healing, of warding off illness and acts of God. Unlike many other countries, where the eggs at Easter are mostly made of chocolate or are souvenirs, in this country it is customary to give each other decorated hard-boiled eggs.

“Bulgarians believe the egg must be “full” so it may bring “a full home, full barns, many offspring in the family,” says ethnologist Dr. Svetlana Rakshieva. For years she has conducted studies involving the identity of the ethnic
community. But she dedicates every spare minute to a unique Bulgarian tradition – decorating eggs. She has studied, mastered and portrayed every technique in existence. For more than ten years she has passed her experience on to children, teachers, to all people who want to take up the challenge of drawing on the surface of the egg.

“It all revolves around the wax-application technique that uses a wooden stylus with a small funnel at its tip – the nib - made of a thin rolled silver coin. Inside the nib a tiny piece of beeswax was placed, it was then exposed to the flame of a candle and the stylus was used for drawing. Afterwards the egg was dipped in the dye, the wax was removed and the ornamentation stood out in all of its magnificence. There is another kind of ornamented eggs, white eggs. They too are decorated using wax, but the wax is tinted black. Once, our grandmothers used tar or soot, now we use oil paint. The ornamentation made using this technique plays much the same role as black borders in embroidery. Then the spaces in-between are tinted. This technique is typical of Bulgaria: it is applied in Ihtiman and the towns and villages in its vicinity. It does exist in the Czech Republic and in Hungary though it is not widely used there.

Two varieties of this technique are practiced in the region of Ihtiman, whereas in Velingrad only the wax-application technique is used. There the coloration is somewhat different; in the past there were many women in this region with a great mastery of genuine wax batik on eggs. But until about ten years ago, women in Velingrad region had no inkling of white eggs, even though Ihtiman and Velingrad are on two sides of one and the same mountain. In Botevgrad and its surroundings acid solution is used for the decoration. There are parts of the country where the tradition of decorating eggs is irrevocably lost. In 1938 prominent Bulgarian ethnographer Hristo Vakarelski organized an international exhibition of decorated eggs in Samokov. Nowadays, people in the town don’t even know what the stylus left them by their grandmother is used for.”

The etched Easter eggs, decorated behind the walls of Zograph Monastery on Mount Athos and Rila Monastery have also been lost in time. The monks there once engraved biblical scenes on them, connected with the Resurrection of Christ. They used to make hundreds to give to the congregation at Easter.

“What sets Bulgarian ornamented eggs apart is that they are more subdued colour-wise; in Western Europe there is a much greater abundance of colour,” Dr. Svetlana Rakshieva goes on to say. “As you travel across Europe from the Northwest to the Northeast, eggs become more and more graphic and the styluses - thinner and thinner. The triquetra or three-foil swastika is one of the most common motifs in Bulgaria, a symbol of the Sun. Another widespread design is the stairway of life – a spiral winding up to the top of the egg. Other motifs include the butterfly, symbolizing the soul and resurrection, the vine – a religious, but also a folklore symbol. In this country eggs continues to be a ritual gift; the ornamentation is not taken from woodcarving, ceramics or embroidery as is the case with other nations. In this country the motifs are taken from Easter and follow the oval shape of the egg.”

Another significant fact is that, unlike the countries of Western Europe, decorated eggs have not become an industry. And one more thing: the motifs never feature love scenes as in other European countries. Every year at Easter the gifted women from the regions of Velingrad and Ihtiman decorate eggs with the same ornaments they remember from their own childhood. And to this day the decorated egg is one of the most beautiful ways to convey a message of health, happiness and love.
SOFIA DESERVES TO BE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE
Interview with Sofia Mayor Mrs. Yordanka Fandakova
by Nina Tsaneva and Joan Kolev
What are the biggest advantages of Sofia as a candidate for European Capital of Culture and where are the efforts of your team focused?

Our city possesses numerous merits and advantages. Sofia has great potential and our task is to develop and present it as best as we can.

Being one of the oldest cities in Europe, Sofia has a very rich cultural heritage. Therefore, in recent years we have invested substantial amounts in its uncovering, restoration and exhibition. Last year we opened to visitors the underground archaeological museum under the Saint Sophia basilica, which enjoys great interest and has many visits - over 30,000. A few years ago, we created a large arts patronage municipal program entitled Culture for External Projects. Then we set as its special priority the city’s Cultural and Historical heritage as we have already funded under it a number of projects for the restoration of icons in the churches from the Minor Holy Mount (Mount Athos) complex, restoration of churches and Urvich medieval fortress.

During the construction of the subway, the largest investment of over 5.5 million leva was made for unearthing the archaeological treasure at the heart of the city. On an area of more than 20,000 square meters the remains of ancient Serdica were uncovered. Let us not forget that Serdica was the favourite city of Roman Emperor Constantine and his residence. All this is about to be exposed in a museum, which will certainly contribute much to attracting tourists. Of course, not only the rich heritage is a resource of the city. Its greatest resource are the people, the artists, the dozens of museums, galleries, theatres always full of people. This is a potential that we want to develop and thus attract many people because culture is an integral part of the city’s economy.

European Capital of Culture is a citizens’ initiative. How is the NGO sector involved in the preparation of Sofia’s bid?

The participation of citizens, not only of artists and the decentralization of culture is crucial. From the outset, we began preparing for the application procedure through numerous public discussions and polls. Over 15,000 people joined in with their own ideas for Sofia. Many NGOs, especially young and creative people are working hard, too. The European trends focus on modern arts being showcased in new urban spaces, most of which have been abandoned. Their revival lends the city a vibrant look, attracting investors. We came up with a few similar ideas - for example, the tram depot at Maria Louisa Boulevard and the space outside the central railway station. We work with young people from various organizations who are willing to lend new dimensions to these places and turn them into venues of the culture industries. We are also collaborating with the young people from “Sofia Breathes” who created one of the most popular festivals in Sofia in recent years, and also we are making efforts for the revival of another deserted area – the former refrigerator factory. Following a decision of the Sofia Municipal Council, the Union of Bulgarian Actors was granted space at the James Boucher subway station for an underground theatre.

Is the business sector offering sufficient assistance?

Apart from joining the nomination committee from the very beginning, businesses now have a clear commitment to the creation of a special fund to finance cultural projects for Sofia’s application for 2019. We expect this fund to contribute to the creation of a sustainable model for promoting culture. These funds are not given just for fun but are an investment - in education, in the cultivation of values, in attracting serious potential.

Cultural and creative industries are a very strong sector in Sofia and here our vision fully matches the vision of the business sector. These industries are ranked fourth in added value compared to all other sectors and we are seeing really good results. Over 80% of the share of these industries in Bulgaria is located on the territory of Sofia. In other words - such investments create jobs. We are glad that businesses support this approach and are willing to participate, as Sofia’s bid for European Capital of Culture is turning into a platform for the development of the city.
What about the festival program of the capital Sofia?

The festival program is a key element in Sofia's bid for European Capital of Culture. We are focussing our efforts on reinforcing already established festivals and at the same time seek opportunities for new ones.

One of the best and well-known forums is the International Sofia Film Festival, which fully complies with the slogan of our application - "Share Sofia" because it has gone beyond Sofia’s limits and travels to different cities. This once again comes to show that Sofia as the capital of Bulgaria can be a motor for the development of the whole country. Currently the Sofia Theatre Salon is taking place - a favourite time for me because Sofia turns from a movie into a theatre stage.

At the same time, we have interesting music festivals such as Sofia Jazz Peak as well as new festivals targeted at the younger, avant-garde audience. One of my favourite is "Sofia breathes". Yet, we are again to reconsider the August Sundays of Sofians in different places in the city that could acquire a transformed look.

These initiatives and cultural practices lend a new face to the urban landscape and contribute to the positivism of all its inhabitants. Let me recall that the so-called “Bridge of Sighs” near the National Palace of Culture was until recently just a walking area and it has now established itself as an open-air arts gallery to such an extent that people look forward to the opening of the new season with a long list of artists wishing to display their works there. In any case, all passers-by get a first-hand experience of art.

Outdoor concerts have also become part of the city’s cultural life. One example is “Opera in the Park” which is held in conjunction with the National Opera and Ballet Theatre. This year the Sofia Philharmonic also joined the initiative with a proposal for outdoor concerts at a very stylish venue, the Vrana Park near Sofia.

Who are the partners of Sofia for its European application?

As I said, the European dimension of the application is crucial as the whole idea originated as a means of enhancing communication between various cities in Europe. Bulgaria and Italy are about to select one city to be the capital of culture of the Old Continent in 2019. We have made contact with a number of Italian cities which helped us in the preparation of the application itself. We implemented several joint projects. Of course, these are contacts that remain, which are not rooted solely in the culture field.

Vienna is also one of our partners ready to help Sofia and the Balkan capitals. Sofia is a really appropriate city to unite the Balkan capital cities, which is very important for the European perspective of our neighbours. I do not want to omit the other Bulgarian cities because it is very important that Sofia is not alone in its application. We are applying along with the South-Western region and are working together with the regional centres of Blagoevgrad, Kyustenidil, and Pernik. At the same time we have turned to the cities which dropped out at the first stage of the application procedure with a proposal not only for support, but for the implementation of joint projects, until and throughout 2019. This partnership is important for me because Sofia has a chance not only to unite, but to help other cities and regions.

Does Sofia’s application for European Capital of Culture need its own ambassadors - there must be many people who would be happy to fulfill this mission?

We are happy that our city already has its ambassadors and their number is constantly growing. Ambassadors of Sofia as a capital of culture are already Toto Cutugno, Patricia Kaas, Pierce Brosnan. Andrea Bocelli backed our application as did Ennio Morricone, and now also Cecilia Attias /Sarkozy/.

We are now expecting the arrival and concert of Sylvie Vartan who is to become an honorary citizen of the city. She herself participates, including via financial support, in the History of Sofia project, on which we are now working.

Sofia deserves this high distinction. I think Sofia is not just a Bulgarian city, but a city of Europe with its rich culture and history. So, we expect more and more people to get involved in supporting its application for European Capital of Culture in 2019.
Welcome to underground Serdica

by Veneta Nikolova

While moving briskly up the yellow cobblestones of Sofia, one rarely thinks that just a few metres below the central boulevards and squares, there is another, completely unknown city lost in darkness and obscurity. It is the ancient Serdica - one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine the Great used to say “Serdica is my Rome” and even though of making it the capital of his vast dominions.

The St. Sophia Basilica, which gave the name of today’s capital, is one of Bulgaria’s iconic cultural and historical monuments. Established in the mid-1st century, the town experienced booming development during the reign of Constantine the Great in the fourth century. The great number of historical remains of residential and administrative buildings, of large squares and early Christian churches tell archaeologists about the turbulent history of the city. Some of them are exposed in the central part of Sofia. In the basement of Saint Sophia, archaeologists have found part of the eastern necropolis of ancient Serdica. The finds are preserved and separated in an underground museum, which this summer became one of the most famous tourist sites of the capital.

The underground museum covers an area of 600 square metres and has three levels depending on the dating of the excavated sites. The entrance is from the basilica itself. A glass staircase leads to this peculiar city of the dead, where silence reigns. Here eternity is lurking behind every wall and tomb. Visitors can see burial facilities dating back to the 3rd and the 5th century. Walking near the stone sarcophagi, tombs covered with stone slabs or those with semi-cylindrical vaults we get a vague idea of the burial rites and beliefs of our ancestors.

Who was buried here? “These were mostly wealthy people with the necessary economic, financial, political and religious power,” explains Yunian Meshekov, archaeologist from the Museum of History in Sofia. “Not everyone could afford to be buried in such a tomb. We have found traces of gold thread and personal items such as jewelry, rings, bracelets and even coins.”

The ruins of an early Christian church and a magnificent mosaic floor make archaeologists believe that the relics of a saint used to be kept here, too. This explains the willingness of the wealthy and the powerful, to be buried in this particular section of the necropolis. Actually in the underground museum of today’s basilica Saint Sophia, one can see the ruins of three ancient Christian churches. The oldest is from the early 4th century. At that time, Christianity was the official religion in the Roman Empire, says Yunian Meshekov. The second church is a basilica, dating to the end of the 4th century. This temple, however, was destroyed by one of the barbarian invasions in this part of the Balkans. Perhaps, the temple was destroyed during the invasion of the Huns in the mid-5th century. It is assumed that the current basilica Saint Sophia was built at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th century.

One of the most interesting findings near the church is a tomb with exquisite colourful murals and crosses. The underground museum is yet to be expanded. Multimedia screens now show visitors short films about the history of the city. Mosaics are currently being restored and visitors will soon be walking upon a century-old floor, archaeologists say.
Ancient Serdica revived in Sofia’s city centre

“The Serdica project combines antiquity with the modern communication arteries of the Bulgarian capital

“Ever growing, never old” – this is Sofia’s motto and it speaks for itself - the city’s history can be traced back to antiquity. Through the ages it has borne different names – Serdica, Sredets, and after the adoption of Christianity in the Roman Empire – Sofia, meaning wisdom. If you have ever visited the capital of Bulgaria, you may have seen a most interesting pedestrian underpass. The remains of the ancient Serdica fortress are on display in the underpass between the Presidency and the Council of Ministers building in the heart of the city. This is the spot where the Eastern Gate of the fortress that flourished in the 2nd – 4th century AD once rose. Serdica’s Roman period started at the beginning of the 1st century AD. At the turn of the 2nd century when Emperor Ulpia Trajan allowed the city independent governance, Ulpia Serdica was born. Official inscriptions speak of the splendor of the “most glorious city of the Serdes” of which Emperor Constantine exclaimed: “Serdica is my Rome!”

Its fortress wall with four gates was erected in the second half of the 2nd century. Archaeological excavations have shown how the Roman city was structured. Remains of this city can be seen in the underpasses in front of the second parliament building, as well in nearby streets and in the new Serdica subway station. Taking the subway to work every morning, passengers now pass by unique finds from antiquity put on display inside the station itself. The Rotunda of St. George, part of a large ancient complex of buildings dated to the late 3rd and the early 4th century, lies in the space between the Presidency and Balkan hotel. Experts describe it as one of the most beautiful buildings from the so-called Constantine neighbourhood of Serdica-Sredets, where the royal palace of Constantine the Great and later that of Sebastocrator Kaloyan once rose. It has survived and come down to us almost intact; it is here that some of the most important sessions of the Serdica Ecumenical Council took place. It was used for baptisms since the 4th century.

What makes Sofia unique is that even though it is a city thousands of years old, its centre has always been in the...
same spot. The first stage of the project aimed at uncovering the ancient Serdica in the new Largo - the pedestrian zone between the buildings of the Council of Ministers, the Central Department Store, the Presidency buildings and Balkan hotel was completed at the end of last year. The ancient city has above- and below-ground levels, covering an area of 1.65 hectares. During the second stage of the project the archaeological structures will become a latter-day cultural event complex in the heart of the restored ancient urban environment. In the words of Sofia’s chief architect Petar Dikov, according to the city’s urban development plan currently being drafted, four buildings will be torn down so as to expose the Serdica amphitheatre. The idea is to create an underground archaeological museum as a second city centre.

According to Sofia Mayor Yordanka Fandukova, the project for a historical underground town of Serdica below the Sofia Largo will apply for the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List. The ultimate objective after the complex is completed is for Bulgaria’s capital city to take its due place alongside cities like Rome and Athens.

The Serdica Coliseum

Parts of the Serdica amphitheatre – a classical gladiatorial Coliseum, dated to the 2nd - 4th century – can be seen at the foundations of the Arena di Serdica hotel. A total of 77 ancient amphitheatres have been discovered in the world, the biggest of them being the Coliseum in Roma. The arena of the Serdica amphitheatre – 60.5 by 43 metres – is just 10 metres smaller than that of the Coliseum in Rome. The Serdica amphitheatre once seated 25,000 and was the third biggest in the world. Eighteen centuries after it was built the amphitheatre of Serdica is now open to the public again. One sixth of the ancient ruins has been restored and is on display inside the Arena di Serdica hotel. The archaeological exposition is open to the public every day free of charge. The arena is covered in sand as it once was – in fact the Latin word for sand is “harena”. The clay slabs here still keep the memory of the tread of different animals – goats, dogs, cats.
SoulsinWalls: Graffiti bring colour to Sofia

Imperial eagles on the wing, cliffs, waterfalls and forests below them have transformed the façade of the St. Kliment Ohridski School No. 32 in Sofia. The gigantic graffiti is an element of the information and educational activities under the Life+ Preserving the Imperial Eagle and Saker Falcon project of the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds. The project aims to draw attention to species that are on the verge of extinction. The imperial eagle is one of the most endangered species on the planet. From one of the most widespread birds of prey in Bulgaria, its population has now dwindled down to 23 reproducing couples.

Partners to the nature conservationists are the artists from 140 ideas – Nikolay Petrov (Flak), Ventsislav Yossifov (Vermain), Ivo Iliev (Yeto) and Lyudmil Iliev (Teleto). Their participation in the project has been free of charge from its start to its implementation. “Get to love the brown bear” is one of their gigantic, 20 by 20 meter graffiti. The 140 Ideas project shows how street art can be used for the purposes of education. The transformation of the façade of the St. Kliment Ochridski School aims to bring the brown bear as a traditional dweller of Bulgaria’s forests, to the attention of the public. The idea to change the face of school façades was among the five winners in the KeepWalkingBulgaria competition for innovative ideas which received financing for projects which could contribute to the country’s development.

But it is not just the school façades but the blind walls of prefab apartment buildings in the capital city – the epitome of socialist construction – that have been transformed into gigantic posters changing the atmosphere in the concrete jungle.

Last year the famous graffiti artists from Poland Etam Cru, alongside the Bulgarian Nasimo and Bozko created veritable works of art on the 25-metre walls of apartment buildings in Sofia’s Hadji
Dimitar residential area. Another block of flats in Hadji Dimitar served as a canvas for creating one more urban landmark, the work of the artist Nasimo. His project was part of the UrbanCreatures Art Festival taking place in Sofia and is called SoulsinWalls. Ninety eight year old Dobri who is depicted on the wall, is known for walking 10 kilometers from his home to the centre of Sofia every day to collect money which he donates to churches and orphanages. In the past 12 years he has collected thousands of leva which he has donated to noble causes. Media abroad have called him a “living saint” and his story has traveled the world via the social media and blogs. The 25-metre graffiti of Dobri conveys in discernible words, a message of goodness, something Dobri himself believes in – humility, honesty, pureness, magnanimity, composure and bashfulness.

**Exhibition in a box: art and electricity?**

Chronologically, before the massive paintings on the façades of Sofia, another initiative triggered a change in the atmosphere of the Bulgarian capital. The idea for the artistic campaign belonged to CEZ electricity distribution company and was implemented together with the Modern Art Gallery and Sofia Municipality. So, fifty young Bulgarian artists were given a free hand to paint pictures on the otherwise drab switchboards in the streets of Sofia. Here is what Delcho Delchev from Transformers says about the artists: “We organized an open contest and 84 people applied with all kinds of works. Of them the jury selected 26 artists. Each of them painted on one, two or three switchboards - both street artists, i.e. people who make graffiti as well as painters who display their works in galleries.”

This open-air gallery of sorts now features more than 100 switchboards with graffiti on them. One of them is the work of Nora Ampova, sister of singer Vladimir Ampov – Grafa. Her graffiti features ostriches that resemble the animals from the video to her brother’s song Going, Going, Gone. “I am so glad that people have been mindful of these switchboards - I have not seen any of them vandalized. And I hope no one will damage mine. I appeal to all people to be good and to just smile even if what they see is not to their taste. Because the urban environment looks so much better now, the city’s atmosphere is changed. Like so many European cities, it is time our own city started looking brighter and more colourful,” the young artist says.
Is it possible to get an idea of the most emblematic landmarks in Sofia in just 120 minutes? Well, anything is possible as long as you show up in the right place at the right time.

The place is the Palace of Justice in the centre of Sofia, the time – 11 AM or 6 PM. In summer or in winter, rain or shine, there is always a motley crowd of foreign tourists in front of the central courthouse building, buzzing away in different languages. A little muddle-headed, city map or guidebook in hand, the tourists set out on their FreeSofiaTour – a walking tour of Sofia that is free of charge, organized by a group of young volunteers who have dedicated their time to a noble cause, that of helping tourists from abroad get to know and love their city.

It is like going into a time warp – that is how the foreigners describe their tour of Sofia and its historical landmarks. Walking through the streets jammed with cars and the crowded pavements, they marvel at the remains of old Roman baths, well-preserved medieval churches and magnificent Secession buildings from the turn of the 20th century reflected in the glazed facades of brand new banks, hotels and malls. The eclectics of different ages and architectural styles makes for the city’s atmosphere, most visitors say. And one way to dive into this atmosphere are the FreeSofiaTours. Tens of thousands of tourists from 107 countries have so far done just that. Information about the tour is passed on by word of mouth, via the Internet or at Sofia hotel desks.

The idea of the organizers is to show more than just the history or the buildings of the city. Guides “initiate” tourists into the city, giving them a chance to choose what they want to see, or if their visit is only a brief one, to come back again. Sometimes the group consists of two-three people, but usually thirty, even fifty people gather in front of the Palace of Justice! Frequently the group is joined by day travelers who say they don’t usually go in for such tours but that they really enjoyed this particular one. The Sofia tour is also joined by businessmen, backpackers, participants in international conferences etc.

The motley groups touring Sofia twice a day have become part of the urban landscape. And the icing on the cake – the tour usually winds up in front of the Alexander Nevski cathedral. Before that the tourists visit the Roman ruins next to Sheraton hotel, see the changing of
the guard in front of the Presidency, the former royal palace, now an art gallery, the garden in front of the National Theatre with its beautiful fountains and the chess players out front. Some even stop a while to play a game of chess with them. Tourists from abroad invariably marvel at the mineral water gushing in the heart of a city with a population of two million! They rush to the water fountains and simply cannot believe the city centre has such an abundance to offer.

And it seems everything we, Bulgarians consider negative is to them exotic. They frequently ask the guides why there are so many potholes and about other things we are accustomed to, but what they say they like is that Sofia is such a quiet town with no throngs of tourists. The superposition of different historical layers is another thing they find very interesting. At the same time Sofia does not have a differentiated historical centre as other cities do, but in all parts of the city, history exists side by side with modernity. Visitors are also thrilled by the unique combination of mountain and mineral water. But what they admire most are Sofia’s parks, the FreeSofiaTour volunteers say. In the eyes of the guests from abroad Sofia is a city that is lush green (something most of us would definitely disagree with). What is more, many of them say it is one of the greenest and cleanest cities they have ever been to!
Girls Present 12 Churches in Kyustendil

Kyustendil (in the Middle Ages it was known as Velbuzhd and in Antiquity as Pautalia) is a town in south-western Bulgaria, close to the border with the Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. It is a spa and tourist centre, an archaeological and architectural reserve and a starting point for hikers in the Ossogovo Mountain. The town’s art gallery displays works of one of the most significant Bulgarian artists - Vladimir Dimitrov, the Master. Kyustendil Spring is the town’s central festival, but there are also others that include the Cherry Festival in June and the Fertility Festival in September.

For almost fifty years, on the eve of March 21, its patron saint’s day, the town of Kyustendil chooses the most beautiful girl in town – Kyustendil Spring Girl, 2014. “Kyustendil Spring” is dedicated to local tradition and history, going back to the time of the Thracians and Romans who once inhabited these fertile lands. In olden times, women would bake ritual loaves to take to a sacred place on top of Hissarluka hill for health and protection of the home.
The first contest for the most beautiful girl that symbolizes the coming spring was held in 1966. From then on, every year in March, in the town’s central square, the beauty contest contenders take from the hands of their predecessors the wealth Kyustendil has been endowed with – its mineral water, fruits and bread. Then, accompanied by a colourful procession, the girls go up to the hill over the town to wish everyone well.

This year the Kyustendil Municipality has added a new element – the town’s beautiful girls are also ambassadors promoting the town’s history and culture. So this spring’s 12 contenders for the title presented 12 Orthodox churches within the municipality. There has been large-scale construction and repair of churches under way in Kyustendil in recent years. For the past three years, 30 Orthodox churches have opened doors here. Most of these are restored old churches as six brand new churches are currently under construction.
Christiane Karam: I try to find a common language between different cultures

by Albena Bezovska

Christiane Karam was born in Beirut which is where her father comes from. She started playing the piano at a very young age, receiving the first lessons from her mother - an Armenian born in the Lebanese capital. Later she graduated from the Berklee College of Music where she now teaches and has been organizing musical events at the prestigious university for the past six years. She is also the founder of a choir where we can hear singing together Americans and Europeans, people from the Middle East, the Balkans and all possible corners of the globe. She studied Indian, African and other ancient cultures and she is the author of vocal works, classical and film music. She has been on the same stage with a number of famous artists. She especially values working with Bobby McFerrin from whom she has learned a lot – about voice, music, rhythm, and most importantly, freedom of spirit.

Christiane first heard Bulgarian folk music in her childhood and inexplicably fell in love with it. In recent years, her teacher has been Binka Dobreva from The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices choir. This famous singer of Bulgarian folk songs from the Thrace region is also the godmother of “Pletenitsa” – the choir Christiane set up and conducts. “I grew up in the midst of an armed conflict and I can still remember the roar of bombs”, Christiane recalls. “Therefore, it is important for me to bring people together, to create an environment in which they communicate, seek common ground between different cultures. In this respect, art has priceless opportunities to offer. I am grateful for being a musician. I believe musicians have a secret mission in the world - to unite people and to create beauty out of diversity”. Her interest in various folk traditions appeared only later, but has dominated her daily pursuits ever since. She says it is a journey to her own roots, which are scattered around the world.

I started to perform Bulgarian songs some fifteen years ago. Gradually I realized that I needed to delineate a special space for this type of music. We officially laid the foundations of Pletenitsa choir about three years ago. The greater part of our repertoire is Bulgarian - songs of The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices choir from different folk regions. We have also included tunes from other folk traditions - Russian, Armenian, Serbian, Gypsy, Turkish, and Western. This is rich and beautiful music that allows us to realize how many common features different cultures have. From the very beginning I started to organize events and invite artists from the East”. This year’s festival which Christiane organizes was devoted to Armenian music. The first three days as usual were full of rehearsals, individual and group activities. The gala concert of all participants started with Bulgarian music - the Pletenitsa choir and the dancers from the Ludo Mlado ensemble for Bulgarian folk dance based in Boston.

“I must have Bulgarian music around me constantly, it makes my heart race with joy,” says the beautiful professor. On March 3, Bulgaria’s National Day of Liberation, she wrote in her Facebook profile: “Happy birthday, Bulgaria!”

How would Christiane depict the Bulgarian folk song on a canvass?

“I see the mountains. I see the face of an elderly woman, perhaps from the Rhodopes, perhaps from another part of Bulgaria, blackened by the sun. I see her eyes which tell the story of her life – she has travelled very difficult roads. She sings and the song helps her survive. This is my feeling. I feel a physical bond to this land. The music and the mountains “talk” to me, telling me stories, especially the Rhodopes. I have been to the Rila and Pirin mountains, I have travelled all over southern Bulgaria but the Rhodopes remain in my heart. I feel happy here, I feel great support. Bulgarians often tell me that I take pride in my work overseas. Therefore, it is important for me to transfer your culture and convey it correctly, with all the details of pronunciation, the vocal subtleties and the characteristic technique of sound production. On the one hand, it is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to learn and practice all this wealth of styles. On the other hand, the responsibility exists to present them to the audience in the most authentic way. I want you to continue to be proud of me,” Christiane Karam concludes.
Two cultural artifacts found and brought back home

by Tatyana Obretenova

The fact that Bulgaria has a diverse cultural heritage attracts numerous connoisseurs from all over the world, but also treasure-hunters, sharks and people trafficking in cultural values. The Interior Ministry, the State Agency for National Security and the Prosecutor’s Office pooled their efforts and rescued two unique Bulgarian artifacts which were brought back home before they were sold illegally abroad – a 3rd century gold Roman necklace and a manuscript - a hand-written collection of religious treatises, a copy made by Todor of Pirdop, a man of letters from the time of the Bulgarian National Revival. The two were put on display for the first time at the Ministry of Culture.

The cultural, historical, scientific and monetary value of these two unique artifacts is immeasurable. The ancient necklace is very rare, one of the best examples of goldsmithery from the Roman Empire’s eastern provinces. It is made of pure gold and weighs 38.55 grams. The whole necklace seems to glow from the inside. As to the manuscript, it bears the signature of one of the last Bulgarian men of letters to have hand-copied books – Todor who worked mostly in Pirdop in the first half of the 19th century. It includes 20 sermons about different saints and major church holidays and 26 colour miniatures.

Here is Prof. Bozhidar Dimitrov, Director of the National Museum of History with more about what makes these two artifacts unique:

“The fact that they are well preserved. We must not forget that manuscripts sometimes come down to us tattered or infested with mildew. While the necklace is a veritable masterpiece. Necklaces like it have been found before but never one exactly like this. It is whole, we rarely find jewelry like it that has not been broken.”

In the words of Prof. Dimitrov the necklace probably belonged to a wealthy lady, an aristocrat as in the 3rd century there were major Roman towns in the area such as Nikopolis ad Istrum, close to the town of Gotse Delchev. “We have checked with world jewelry experts and there is no other necklace like this one. That is why we chose to put it on display. Otherwise there are over 60,000 artifacts that have been intercepted during trafficking. The necklace was probably made locally, because Thrace and Macedonia are the two “boomtowns” of the Roman Empire,” Prof. Dimitrov explains.

The pilfered Bulgarian manuscript, rescued before it was auctioned off by Sotheby’s, comprises 128 pages, but the first 24 are missing. They were probably torn off on purpose so as to conceal its location. However, it is beyond any doubt that in 1870 it was being read by the people in the village of Makotsevo, Sofia district, says Prof. Boryana Hristova, Director of the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library. “Seven manuscripts by Todor of Pirdop are kept at the National Library,” she says. “They are all full of astrology signs and their description and prophecies reaching up to the year 2000. This one is an early manuscript, written by him when he was still bound by the canon. But Todor is also very adept as an artist. He painted some of the best prophecy games in written Bulgarian tradition. The fact that this manuscript was found and brought back home is an important element of our written 19th century culture.”
The Ludogorets phenomenon – from third division to round of 16 in Europa League

by Wilhelm Baltagian

“This is just the beginning…”

“This is just the beginning. We have completed a number of stages in our development as a team in Europe. We learned a lot. When we played versus Basel, we were not ready for these matches. Now we tried to prove we can play modern football. There was nothing to lose and our goal was to play aggressive football.” This is the optimistic way in which Ludogorets manager Stoycho Stoev marked the end of the campaign of his team in the Europa League, in which the Razgrad-based team reached the round of 16, sadly losing to Spanish Valencia. Stoev’s prediction is that next year the performance of Ludogorets will be even better.

What was the beginning of the Ludogorets phenomenon?

If five years ago someone had said that the local football team of Ludogorets, from the small town of Razgrad in Northeastern Bulgaria would become champion of Bulgaria for two consecutive years and would reap victory after victory in the Europa League, most likely he would be considered an absolute visionary or a joker. Until then, the biggest successes of the local team, founded in 1945, were reaching the semi-final of the Soviet Army Cup in 1983 and the 6th place in the “B” group in 1999.

The big rise of Ludogorets began in the 2009/10 season, when the team was able to move from group “C” to group “B” of the football championship. Then the team’s owner became businessman Cyril Domuschiev and Ivaylo Petev was appointed coach. During the following season the team entered the elite “A” division. The debut of Ludogorets against the best Bulgarian teams was more than impressive. The team first
won the Bulgaria Cup after a 2-1 victory against Plovdiv's Lokomotiv FC before triumphing as champions in the tournament, after winning 1:0 against CSKA. In that same year, Ludogorets also won the Super Cup of this country.

During the 2012-2013 season, a second consecutive championship cup went to Ludogorets. Thus, the team from Razgrad became the only officially recognized team in Europe with such an achievement completed soon after making its debut in the elite. The players won the prize for best defence in the A League with just 13 goals in their net. This achievement proves to be one of the best in Europe (an average of 0.43 goals per game). Despite the shaky start of the new football season and with new manager Stoycho Stoev, the team is again at the top of the current championship chart together with the Lovech-based team of Litex FC.

Manager Stoycho Stoev opens new page in Ludogorets history

With the arrival of new head coach Stoycho Stoev, Ludogorets has opened a new page in its modern history – participation in the Europa League. The former player of the Sofia-based Lokomotiv FC introduced a new, more aggressive style of playing. And it has paid off. The dramatic loss in the final minutes of the first game of the preliminary round of the Champions League against Slovan Bratislava was forgotten soon after the successive 3:0 victory. In the playoffs for entry into the group stage of the most prestigious European club competition, the team was eliminated by far more classy rival Basel but continued to participate in the second most important football competition on the Old Continent - the Europa League.

Logically, the most successful participation in the group stage of the Europa League in the history of Bulgarian football came next. Ludogorets became the first Bulgarian team that headed the final standings in its group. The Bulgarian champion has one draw at home versus Chernomorets (Odessa) and 5 victories – twice against the Dutch PSV and Dinamo (Zagreb) and one time as a guest in Odessa.

Flight over Rome, landing in Valencia and dreams about the future

Memorable matches against the Italian Lazio followed in the first round. In the first match in Rome, Ludogorets won 1:0. In Sofia, however, the match started differently. The Italian team managed to score in the first minute of the game. At the beginning of the second half, Lazio increased their lead and the score was 2:0. But then with lots of determination, Ludogorets managed to score two goals for 2-2. This result meant Ludogorets would qualify for the next stage but the match was not over yet. Eight minutes before the end, German striker Miroslav Klose put the ball into the net of the Bulgarian champions. The 88th minute came when the goalkeeper and a defender of the Italian team were surprised by Brazilian Kishada who scored for the final 3-3 draw, which opened the way for Ludogorets to the round of 16.

The first match against Valencia in Sofia started with an early goal by the visiting team. But subsequent events seemed to call for a different outcome. In the middle of the first half, the Bulgarian champions were given a penalty and experienced Valencia midfielder Seydou Keita received a red card. Unfortunately, the shot of Slovenian Roman Bezyak was stopped by the goal keeper and this somehow crushed the enthusiasm of Ludogorets. The experienced players of Valencia, even with one player less, completely controlled the situation and reached a 3:0 victory. In the second match in Spain, Valencia won 1-0 but Ludogorets performed well and fans hope the optimistic forecasts of the ambitious coach for the next European season will come true.
What’s on in April

April 4, Tutrakan
First National Competition of wedding orchestras

April 10-12, Veliko Tarnovo
Cultural Tourism Exchange

April 13
Palm Sunday – religious holiday and folk customs (lazaruvane)

April 19 – May 12, Sofia
International Festival of Contemporary Art “Sofia contemporary”

April 19, Zlatograd
Exhibition ”Easter eggs and bread”, Egg paining in the open

April 20
Easter – religious feast

April 20, Sofia
JAM ON IT International Festival of Urban Culture and Arts

April 26, Veliko Tarnovo
Folklore Festival for amateur clubs ”Bolyarsko dancing contest”

April 30 – May 4
Sail Area of the Bay of Bourgas
International sailing regatta ”Bourgas port”

April 30 – May 1, Varna
Regatta SCF Black Sea Tall Ships
The Sound Recording Studio of BNR
First Studio

Area of 420 square meters
Volume of 4500 cubic meters
Reverberation time 1.35 s
Sound engineers’ control room
Area of 31 square meters
Volume of 90 cubic meters
Sound recording equipment

Audio mixing consoles:
- SSL DUALITY 48 channels
- DAW:
- 24 channels AD/DA Alfa Link MADI SX
- 24 channels AD/DA Alfa Link MADI AX
- SOUNDSCAPE SS 32
- SOUNDSCAPE Mix/Editor SW
- PC&HP XW 4600
- 2 monitors HP LP 2065

Audio monitors:
- GENELEC 1035
- GENELEC 1031

Other equipment:
- Analogue: STUDER A812
- Recorder SONY PCM 800-24
- DAT SONY 2800

Audio processing equipment:
- GUITAR AMPLIFIERS:
  - DYNACORD TURBO
  - DYNACORD B412
  - FENDER SHOWMAN REVERB

Musical Instruments:
- 3 STEINWAY
- YAMAHA
- FENDER-RODES 73
- HAMMOND ORGAN
- YAMAHA ELECTRON – E3
- Vibraphone PREMIER, marimba
- Xylophone and bells MUSSER
- Timpani and big drum
- Drum set LUDWIG
- Glockenspiel, celesta
- Harpsichord and harps

Additional equipment:
- Sound system
The world Internet service of the Bulgarian National Radio

The birth date of Radio Bulgaria, also known in the past as the Foreign Service of BNR, is May 16, 1936. Since that day, despite the ups and downs of political life in this country, this programme has presented to the world Bulgaria's cultural and national identity. Over the decades, Radio Bulgaria has become a basic and reliable source of information on this country for people all over the globe. Proof to that end are the dozens of thousands of contacts with people on all continents. These contacts have constantly been expanding, entering a new technological stage: as of February 1, 2012 our programmes are available on the Internet.

You can find them in 11 languages, offering Information in text, sound and image. Radio Bulgaria's creative potential and technical level allows us to launch a multimedia product building the up-to-date image of this country. Through this product the team of the media would gladly respond, as it has always done, to each sign of interest in Bulgaria, to your desire to learn more about this country's history, culture, traditions and folklore; the Bulgarians' everyday life and their contribution to world processes. Our programme upholds, through the articles we offer, the public mission and prestige of the Bulgarian National Radio among its ever-growing listening and reading audience the world over.

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