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THE VOICE OF BULGARIANS IN UKRAINE

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CONTENTS

The Voice of Bulgarians in Ukraine



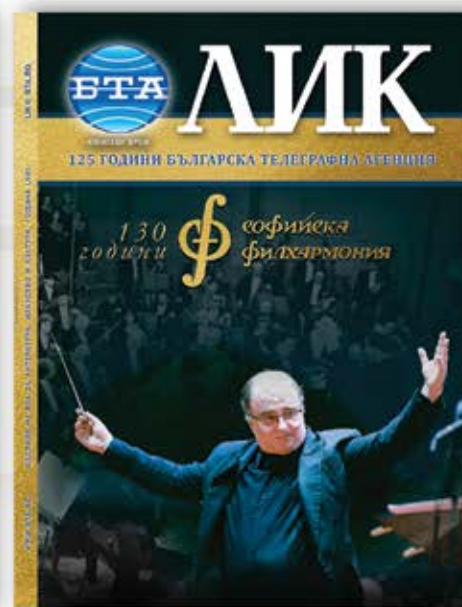
OCTOBER



NOVEMBER



DECEMBER



JANUARY

ЛМК

4. Bulgarians in Ukraine
5. Bulgarian Festivals in Ukraine
12. Bulgarian Cultural Centre in Bolhrad Celebrates 25th Anniversary
13. Galina Ivanova: The Bulgarian People in Bolhrad Have Always Lived with Their Holidays, Customs and Rituals
16. G. S. Rakovski School in Bolhrad: the First Bulgarian Secondary School outside Bulgaria
21. Prof. Nikolay Chervenkov: I Am Glad that my Work Motivated the Opening of Vasil Levski's Monument in Moldova
24. Niko Stoyanov: Bulgaria Was a Dream that Came True
27. Aleksandr Kara: My Body is in Bessarabia, my Spirit Is in Bulgaria
30. Liliya Semkova: Bulgarian Folk Song Is my Soul
32. Mihaela Aroyo: Through my Photos I Portray the Everyday Life of Bessarabian Bulgarians
34. Banitsa – the Queen of Bulgarian Tables
35. Bulgarian Traditional Ritual Peperuda in Kubei
36. Bessarabian Village of Chiyshii Celebrates Midsummer in the Old Style
37. Bulgarian Traditions Related to Engagements in the Village of Kubei
38. Fekla the Quilt Maker
39. Mala Pereshchepina – The Place Where the Kubrat Treasure Was Found
42. Bulgarian Monuments in Ukraine
46. Bulgarian Painters in Ukraine - the Culture Trove of the Bulgarian People
48. Yona Tukuser Recreates in Paintings Holodomor's Tragedy for Bessarabian Bulgarians
51. Bulgarian in Ukraine Paints Landscapes on Missile, Shell Fragments
52. To Paint the Life of Bulgarians on... Gourds
53. Motherly Care for the Soldiers
54. Maksym Spasov: We Must Move On despite the Reality We Live in
56. Yordan Eftimov Wrote the World's First Book of Poetry about the War in Ukraine
58. Bessarabian Bulgarians in the BTA news



ЛМК

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Deputy Director of BTA Department for Bulgarian Media and Communities around the World

The year 2022 was marked by the words "war", "inflation", "elections" and "Ukraine", shows a large-scale research conducted by the literacy platform How To Write. I intended to begin this text without mentioning the war. However, my journalistic instinct is to say what is happening directly, without embellishment, or as one of my teachers used to tell me: "Don't beat around the message in a text, shoot".

The current issue of LIK magazine focuses on the region of Bessarabia, the name of which, as we know, originates from the dynasty of the Wallachian voivode Basarab, who at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century briefly ruled the region between Kilia and Bilhorod-Dnistrovsky. The publication is dedicated to the first year of the war in Ukraine. In the pages that follow, one will not find analyses, political promises, speeches and pathos, nor the stories of those who faced the dozens of incarnations of war and were forced to leave their homes in search of salvation.

The following pages are about those who remained, about the Bessarabian Bulgarians within the borders of Ukraine. My own experience, spanning several months now, with news about these people, can be summed up in the word "memory".

I will spare you the historical references of who, how, when and why settled in Bessarabia. However, I wish more people knew how the Bessarabian Bulgarians now are going through their trying days – days in which for us in Bulgaria the

war remained in the second half of the newscasts. Days when people in Odessa, Bolhrad and elsewhere are never sure if they will have electricity or water, what the winter days will bring them, while a part of them rely on donated generators. Days when words like: "The doors of the Bulgarian centre are open" can be heard in Odessa, "We try to organize charity concerts and exhibitions as much as possible. When the power goes out during an event, we light candles. People don't want to leave, so we keep going". And thus, the stories in between the dark and the light also manage to reach the news stream, albeit belatedly, given the effects of the war. These are stories about Olympiads, competitions, children's celebrations.

Meanwhile, due to the war, publication of the Bulgarian newspaper *Roden Glas* in Ukraine was discontinued after 30 years. At the beginning of November 2022, its Editor-in-chief Dora Kostova, and two of the authors of the articles and interviews we prepared for the current issue of LIK, Maria Popova and Anya Terzivets, were awarded the 13 Centuries Bulgaria National Endowment Fund award at the Seventeenth World Meeting of the Bulgarian Media in Israel.

The following pages are dedicated to those of our compatriots for whom memory has a meaning. A memory that keeps us from repeating the same mistakes over and over again. Memory as a capsule of time and memories that we pass on to each other, that connects us to each other and does not timidly give way to fear. I will give you just one example, with the words of Yona Tukurser, the Bessarabian Bulgarian woman who painted the famine after the Second World War, who told about it both through her paintings and through her words, some of which sound like this: "I have a memory of when I was a student in 5th grade and our history teacher showed us a picture of the famine in the USSR and Ukraine. He presented us with a photograph of cannibals from the Volga region in 1921-1922. I was so shocked that this remained etched in my consciousness for life. The teacher gave us homework to ask our grandparents how they experienced the famine in 1946-1947 and to write their story. This was the first time all of us in class were hearing of it. The shock that I experienced as a child from this photo provoked me to return to this topic as a student. I shared with my colleagues from the art academy about the famine, and it turned out that they did not know the history of the Bessarabian Bulgarians and the tragedy of mass starvation. This inspired me to recreate history in paintings to show what our ancestors went through."

I invite you to read more of Yona's words, as well as the words of the other people in this issue of LIK magazine, in the interviews and in the articles on the following pages.

ISSUE AUTHORS

Anya Terzivets



Anya Terzivets was born in the endless Budzhak steppe, in the southern part of Ukraine, which she fell in love with forever. After graduating from the school in the village of Devitlii, she came to Bulgaria, where she studied to be a journalist at Sofia University. Returning to Odessa after the birth of her son, Terzivets immersed herself in the world of journalism. She worked in the *Roden Krai* newspaper and wrote poems about the Bulgarians, about her grandmother's songs, about the vine planted by her grandfather... and about love. "Love is Holy" is the title of her first collection of poems. Since 2013, she has been an author and presenter of the TV and radio programme Voice of the Bulgarians. And for 10 years now, her voice and the voices of hundreds of her characters tell stories about themselves and about life in Ukraine, in the

Bulgarian language. She has participated in numerous television projects but remained faithful to print journalism as well. For LIK magazine, she was happy to share several symbolic stories about the life of Bulgarians in Ukraine.

Maria Popova

Maria Popova was born in 1974 in Novi Troyan, Bolhrad Region, Ukraine. She graduated in Russian and Bulgarian philology at the Comrat State University and had her postgraduate studies at the South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University. She is a Doctor of Philosophy now. She is also editor-in-chief of the *Obozrenie Plus* newspaper.

The topics of her journalistic materials are mainly related to the socio-cultural and political life of Bulgarians in Ukraine.



Svetlana Dragneva

Svetlana Dragneva was born in 1973 in the village of Vinogradnoe, Bolhrad Region, Bessarabia, Ukraine. In 1995, she graduated in Bulgarian philology at the Southwest University in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. She is currently a doctoral student at Sofia University. Since 1996, she has been actively involved in the cultural and educational activities of the Bulgarian community in Ukraine. She is the deputy chair of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, editor-in-chief of the all-Ukrainian weekly *Bulgarians: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, published in Bulgarian.

Since May 2022, she has been an editor in the BG



World Department of BTA.

She received the award of the Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, the Ivan Vazov medal, and the State Award of Ukraine for her cultural activity.

Bulgarians in Ukraine

Bulgarian Festivals in Ukraine

Svetlana Dragneva

The Bulgarian people have a rich folklore heritage, created for centuries and reflecting the tragic five centuries of Ottoman oppression, as well as their year-round domestic and personal life. After moving to Bessarabia about 200 years ago, the first settlers brought with them a bundle of household items and... the Bulgarian folk song, music and dance, which were their comfort and salvation in difficult times and brought joy in happy moments. This folklore wealth, passed down from generation to generation, has been preserved to this day. If one goes to a Bulgarian village in Bessarabia or Tavia, they will be greeted with the sounds of Bulgarian song and music.

Bulgarian communities and centres have the responsibility of preserving Bulgarian folklore. Nearly 200 companies for Bulgarian folk music and folk dance have been established at these centres. The modern Bulgarian people in Ukraine promote the Bulgarian traditions and customs, educating the younger generations. This characterizes them as true patriots who, despite the current financial difficulties, preserve and protect their traditional culture.

Over the years, many district, regional and all-Ukrainian fairs and festivals have been organized in independent Ukraine.

According to official data from the all-Ukrainian population census in 2001, 204,600 Bulgarians live on the territory of Ukraine, sixth in number after Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians, Moldovans and Crimean Tatars. According to unofficial data, the number of Bulgarians in Ukraine is over 300,000. They live mostly in Odessa, Zaporizhzhia Region, Kirovohrad and Mykolaiv Regions, as well as in Crimea.

Bulgarian immigrants settled on the territory of present-day Ukraine in the wake of the Russo-Turkish wars (1768 - 1774, 1787 - 1792, 1806 - 1812, 1828 - 1829). The historical, spiritual and cultural centre for the Bulgarians is the city of Bolhrad, which was founded in 1821. Bulgarians built settlements, churches and schools.

After settling in the deserted steppes of Budzhaka and Tavia at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, over ten generations of Bulgarians preserved their Bulgarian identity, language, traditions and customs to this day.

A total of 150,600 Bulgarians live in the Odessa Oblast, a third in number after Ukrainians and

Russians. In the southern part of the region, the so-called Budzhak, or Bessarabia, there are more than 50 Bulgarian villages. Several villages were also established in Ivanovo Region, near Odessa.

Some 27,700 Bulgarians live in Zaporizhzhia Region, also third in number after Ukrainians and Russians. In the second half of the 19th century (1861 - 1862), there was an internal migration of Bulgarians. Part of the people living in Bessarabia moved en masse to the free lands of Tavia (today's Zaporizhzhia Region). There they founded nearly 30 villages in the Primorski, Pryazovskiyi, Berdyansk and Melitopol Regions.

The oldest Bulgarian settlements were within the borders of the modern Kirovohrad Region - the villages of Dobroe and Stankuvata. The arrival of the first settlers dates back to 1774.

According to official data, 5,600 people live in Ternovka (today a micro district of the regional centre of Nikolaev). The first Bulgarian settlers arrived there in 1801.

Bulgarians began to move to the Crimean Peninsula by sea in 1802. Before the deportation that occurred during the Second World

War, the Bulgarian population there was over 15,000 people. In 1944, 12,000 Bulgarians were deported to Central Asia together with Crimean Tatars, Greeks and Germans. After their rehabilitation in the 1990s in a then-independent Ukraine, the Bulgarian population in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea numbers nearly 2,000.

The Bulgarian community in the country, along with representatives of other nationalities, received a constitutional right of ethnographic self-determination after the declaration of Ukraine's independence in 1991. A large number of regional, city and district Bulgarian associations were established and are still active. Among them, four organizations have all-Ukrainian status: Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine (founded in 1993, chairman Anton Kise), Congress of Bulgarians in Ukraine (founded in 2007, chairman Yuriy Gramatik), All-Ukrainian Assembly of Bulgarians in Ukraine (founded in 2013, chaired by Dora Kostova), Bulgarian National Assembly in Ukraine (established in 2014, chairperson Valery Tverdovsky).

1. FESTIVAL OF BULGARIANS IN UKRAINE



According to an old tradition in Bessarabia, Tavia and Crimea, handed down from generation to generation for two centuries, Bulgarians in Ukraine gather at this festival.

It is a celebration of the Bulgarian national identity, a celebration of the song and dance art of the Bulgarian people, a time and place to reflect on what has been achieved.

The gathering carries in its history the values of the folk

spirit, honouring traditions, family and ancestral roots.

The event brings people together and creates a feeling of unity. The Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine has been organized by the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine (chaired by Anton Kise) since 1998. By 2020, the Association had held a total of 9 All-Ukrainian festivals in the country, of which eight were held in Odessa and Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiyi, and one in Melitopol.

The Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine was established in 1993. Today, it unites nearly 100 regional, district, city and village societies, organizations and Sunday schools. During the 30-year

activity of the All-Ukrainian Association, a huge number of events have been organized and held: meetings, festivals, celebrations, scientific conferences, and round tables. Over a hundred books related to the history and culture of Bulgarians in Ukraine have been published. Dozens of monuments and memorial plaques have been mounted.



First Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Odessa, 1998

It was held on the initiative of the Odessa Bulgarian Society with the active support of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Nearly 1,500 Bulgarians took part in the event held in September, many meetings and get-togethers between friends and relatives took place there. The best Bulgarian amateur ensembles from Bessarabia participated in it. Traditional Bulgarian wrestling also attracted a great amount of interest. The success of the event proved that this was the best way to revive traditions.



Second Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Odessa, 2001

The second festival was dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the resettlement of Bulgarians in Odessa. The geography of participants expanded. Over 2,000 Bulgarians from all over Ukraine came to the event. Guests of honour at the celebration included a group of Bulgarian members of Parliament, representatives of the Ukrainian authorities from Kyiv, Odessa and the region. In addition to the rich concert programme, the All-Ukrainian Centre of Bulgarian Culture in Odessa and the Bulgarian Cultural Centre in Bolhrad organized a large exhibition of Bulgarian folk art and crafts.



Third Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Odessa, 2003

Already an established tradition, the third Odessa festival was expected eagerly by young and old. It was dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, which encompassed nine associations and became an all-Ukrainian Bulgarian organization, uniting over 60 Bulgarian organizations. The programme of the event included a large ethnographic exhibition, and a folklore concert by Bulgarian artists from Bessarabia and Tavia.



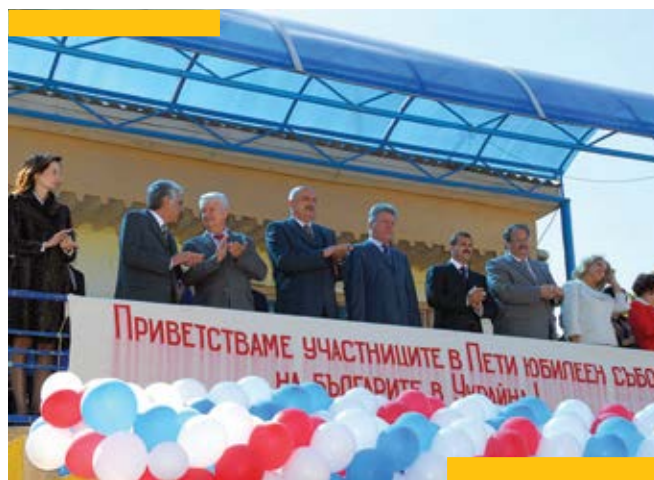
Fourth Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Odessa, 2005

It brought together over 3,000 Bulgarians from Ukraine, Moldova and Bulgaria. The programme included an exhibition of Bulgarian artist from Crimea, the 9th International Scientific Conference of Bulgarians in the Northern Black

Sea Region, a big festive concert, wrestling competitions and an ethnographic exhibition. The guest of honour at the event was then Vice President of Bulgaria, Angel Marin.

Fifth Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Odessa, 2007

It gathered over 5,000 of Bulgarians from Ukraine and Bulgaria. The guest of honour, Bulgarian Vice President Angel Marin, opened the 10th International Scientific Conference of Bulgarians in the Northern Black Sea Region, with the participation of researchers from Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria and Russia. Attendees enjoyed a wonderful gala concert with the participation of the best Bulgarian folk ensembles from Bessarabia. The main event of the festival were performances by Bulgarian folk singer Iliya Lukov and the Pirin Folk Ensemble, who, together with the audience of thousands, created the longest horo chain dance in the world. Bulgarian pop prima Lili Ivanova was welcomed with standing ovation and adoration, and her concert became the highlight of the event. For the first time in the history of the Bulgarian diaspora, the Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine was



broadcast live on several Bulgarian satellite channels. It was a symbolic unification of Bulgarians scattered around the world.

Sixth Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Odessa, 2013

More than 7,000 Bulgarians from all over Ukraine attended the festival in 2013. Official guests at the main cultural event included MPs from the Ukrainian and Bulgarian parliaments, the leadership of Odessa Region and the city of Odessa. Traditionally, concerts were held throughout the day with the participation of artists and improvised folklore and dance ensembles, as well as an exhibition of traditional Bulgarian folk music. At the end of the festival, during a performance by Bulgarian folk singer Iliya Lukov, everyone joined a long horo chain dance. The festival was broadcast live on several Bulgarian satellite channels.

Seventh Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy Fortress, 2016

Ukrainian and Bulgarian state officials took part in this edition of the festival. The event brought together 10,000 people from Ukraine, Moldova and other countries.

The 14th International Scientific Conference of Bulgarians in the Northern Black Sea Region took place within the framework of the event, with the participation of over 60 scientists from Ukraine, Bulgaria, Moldova and Russia. It was organized by the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine together with Veliko Tarnovo University, and the Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad.

The program of the festival included a gala concert with the participation of performers Ekaterina Buzhinskaya, Veselin Marinov, Iliya Lukov, artists and amateur music and dance ensembles from Odessa, Zaporizhzhya, Kirovohrad Region, Bulgaria and Moldova. One of the highlights of the festival was a show of a Kukeri group from the town of Pernik. On the programme was also an exhibition of Bulgarian artists from Ukraine.



Eighth Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy Fortress, 2018

Held on September 15, 2018, the festival took place in the Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy fortress (also known as Akkerman fortress). Bulgarian and Ukrainian officials, and members of the Bulgarian diaspora from Ukraine, Moldova and other countries took part in the event. Among the performers were Valya Balkanska and the 100 Kaba Gaidi Bulgarian bagpipe



Ninth Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine. Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia, 2020

The event took place in the Gorky city park. The Ukrainian multicultural capital of Melitopol welcomed Bulgarians from all over Ukraine, as well as from Moldova and Bulgaria. For the first time, the Festival of Bulgarians in Ukraine took place on Tavrian soil. Since 2012, Melitopol has had a twinning agreement with Sliven.

The celebration was attended by Bulgarian and Ukrainian officials, the local government representatives of Zaporizhzhya Region and Melitopol, as well as Taraclia Region in Moldova.

The event opened with a procession of Bulgarian folklore groups from all Ukraine, together with representatives of other national cultural societies from the Zaporizhzhia Region. The festive program continued with a large concert with the participation of more than 50 groups for traditional music and dance, as well as with an exhibition of applied and decorative art by Bulgarian and Ukrainian artists.

A monument to Bulgarian freedom fighter Hadji Dimitar was unveiled on September 11 within the framework of the

band, singer Desi Dobrova, as well as 800 Bulgarian soloists from Bulgarian folk ensembles from Ukraine, Moldova and Bulgaria, among whom was the famous Kukeri group from the village of Dolna Sekira, Pernik District.

Paintings by prominent artists from Bessarabia like Ivan Shishman, Alexander Kara, Mihail Peychev, Pavel Makedonski, Zlata Shishman and others were exhibited within the festival.

An exhibition, titled "Family Memory" by Asen Velikov, one of the most esteemed ethnographers in Bulgaria, was presented in the medieval fortress. More than 10,000 people attended in the event.



festival on Sliven Square in Melitopol. On the same day, Bulgarian scientists from Ukraine, Bulgaria and Moldova gathered at the 15th International Scientific Conference of Bulgarians in the Northern Black Sea Region.

The Bulgarian community in Zaporizhzhia Region (Tavria) currently numbers over 30,000 Bulgarians and is mainly located in the Primorski, Pryazovskiy, Berdyansk and Melitopol Regions, as well as in Zaporizhzhia. They are descendants of Bulgarian immigrants from Bessarabia in 1862.

2. IZVOR BULGARIAN REGIONAL FOLK FESTIVAL IN BERDYANSK



The regional festival of Bulgarian culture, Izvor (Stream), in Berdyansk has already had more than 20 years of history. The first festival started on May 24, 2001 and was dedicated to the 140th anniversary of the resettlement of Bulgarians from Bessarabia to Tavia (1861-1862). Between 2001 and 2021, 18 editions of the Bulgarian festival were held in Berdyansk.

The event was initiated and organized by the Berdyansk Bulgarian Society Rodolyubie under its long-time chairman Larisa Savchenko. Over the years, nearly 100 Bulgarian folk

ensembles and dance groups, as well as individual performers from the entire Zaporizhzhia Region and Bessarabia, have participated in the festival. Bulgarian folk singer Iliya Lukov has been a guest participant in the festivals in Berdyansk a number of times. The main goal of the event is the preservation and popularization of the Bulgarian cultural heritage.

Historical and linguistic conferences have been organized within the framework of the Izvor festival, books dedicated to the Tavrian Bulgarians have been presented there. During the 2007 edition of the festival, a monument of Bulgarian national hero Vasil Levski was unveiled at the initiative of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine and the Berdyansk Bulgarian Society Rodolyubie. The bust was a donation by the Berdyansk Bulgarians from the Vasil Levski Foundation.

The Berdyansk Bulgarian Society Rodolyubie was established in 1989. Under its auspices, numerous events and celebrations related to the Bulgarian community in Tavia, as well as the history and culture of the Bulgarian people, were organized. For many years, the Vasil Levski Bulgarian Sunday school operated under the association.

3. MLADOST YOUTH FESTIVAL OF BULGARIAN CULTURE IN PRIMORSK

The children's and youth festival of Bulgarian culture Mladost (Youth) is the only youth festival of its kind in the Zaporizhzhia Region. It was held for the first time in October 2016 in Primorsk. The event was organized as part of the celebrations of the 155th anniversary of the resettlement of the Bulgarians from Bessarabia to Tavia (1861-1862).

The festival has had only two editions, the second being in 2019. It was created and organized by the Primorsky Bulgarian Cultural and Educational Society Sdruzhenie, chaired by Stefan Namliev. Its goal is to introduce Bulgarian traditions and preserve historical memory for the young generation. A large number of children's and youth ensembles from Bulgarian Sunday schools and general education schools from the Primorski, Pryazovskiy, Berdyansk and Melitopol Regions have taken part in the youth event.

The Primorsky Bulgarian Cultural and Educational Society Sdruzhenie was established in 1989. It organized various events, celebrations and conferences, as well as initiated monuments and memorial plaques dedicated to the victims of political repressions in the 1930s and 1940s, and to many historical figures and events related to the history



and culture of Bulgaria. The association also established a number of Sunday schools, as well as the John Atanasov regional cultural and educational centre, which has opened more branches in the Bulgarian villages

4. ESTY KONTAKT MEETING OF BULGARIAN YOUTH IN BESSARABIA



In 2009, the Bulgarian youth club Aktiv and the Congress of Bulgarians in Ukraine began organizing summer meetings of Bulgarian youth in the Bessarabian region of Ukraine and Moldova, titled "Esty Kontakt" (There Is A Contact). This regional event in Bessarabia has become a tradition. So far, 13 meetings have been organized, with a large number

of young Bulgarians from Ukraine, Moldova and Bulgaria taking part.

The aim of Aktiv, chaired by Alexey Kutsarev, was to promote Bulgarian culture, meet old friends, establish closer ties between the regions in Bessarabia.

The Congress of Bulgarians in Ukraine was established in 2007 with Yuriy Gramatik as chairman. The organization initiated and organized a number of regional events, conferences and meetings related to Bulgarian history. A monument of national hero Hristo Botev was unveiled in Odessa. The organization also supported the establishment cultural and educational centres Az, Buki, VEDI in Odessa, Bolhrad, Illichivsk, Izmail, etc.

The Bulgarian youth club Aktiv was established in 2007. It set out to work with young Bulgarians in Odessa and Odessa Region, with the aim of developing, preserving and popularizing Bulgarian self-awareness, culture and way of life.

5. PALETTE OF BULGARIAN TALENTS CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH FESTIVAL IN ODESSA



It began in 2018 in Odessa and was organized by the Bulgarian National Assembly in Ukraine, chaired by Valery Tverdovsky. It features dozens of children's and youth Bulgarian vocal ensembles and dance groups, as well as individual performers from the Odessa Region. The prize fund of the winners is 60,000 Ukrainian hryvnias.

The Bulgarian National Assembly in Ukraine is an All-Ukrainian organization established in 2014. During this period, the Bulgarian organization managed to implement a number of cultural Bulgarian projects in Odessa and the region, such as: celebrations of the Day of Bessarabian Bulgarians, the Day of Slavic Writing, Haide na Megdana (Lets go to the Square) and many others.

Bulgarian Cultural Centre in Bolhrad Celebrates 25th Anniversary

Maria Popova

One of the oldest Bulgarian cultural and educational organizations and the first Bulgarian cultural centre in Ukraine celebrated its 25th anniversary last December.

The opening of the first cultural institution of its kind, the Odessa Regional Centre for Bulgarian Culture, in the unofficial capital of Bulgarians in Ukraine, Bolhrad, a quarter of a century ago was a spectacular event in the cultural life of the region. It was initiated by a group of members of the St. St. Cyril and Methodius Bulgarian National Cultural Society.

The first director of the centre, Olga Grinazhuk, gathered a group of experts who embraced the mission of preserving and making popular the Bulgarian culture and the Bulgarian language, and reviving the Bulgarian traditions and customs.

A Bulgarian library was opened, as well as a museum. A singing and dance ensemble was established, and an exhibition hall was opened. A Bulgarian-language page was added to the state newspaper Druzhiba, and active publishing activity was underway, with books published on the history, culture and folklore of Bessarabian Bulgarians.

The centre has been working under the leadership of Galina Ivanova since 2003. Since then, the number of its collaborators began to increase, and the scope of its activity expanded.

The centre offers children and adults an opportunity to study the cultural and historical heritage of their home region. It organizes scientific and practical conferences, book presentations, exhibitions of Bessarabian Bulgarian artists,



meetings with writers, musicians, singers.

The activity of the cultural centre is synched with the social and cultural programme of Bolhrad and Odessa Region. The concerts, exhibitions and events organized by the centre around Christmas and Easter, and traditional Bulgarian feast days, including Babinden, Trifon Zarezan and Baba Marta, are also becoming a tradition.

The cultural centre of the Bulgarians in Bolhrad also offers courses for students preparing to apply for Bulgarian and Ukrainian universities. There are courses in Bulgarian history, Bulgarian language and Bulgarian literature.



Photos: Regional Centre for Bulgarian Culture

Galina Ivanova, Director of the Regional Centre for Bulgarian Culture:

Bulgarian People in Bolhrad have Always Lived with their Holidays, Customs and Rituals

Svetlana Dragneva

The Regional Centre for Bulgarian Culture was opened on December 10, 1997. It was created in Bolhrad, which is considered the centre of the Bulgarian community in Ukraine from both a historical and contemporary standpoint. The southern part of the Odessa Oblast - Bessarabia - has been home to the largest compact Bulgarian community for over two centuries. This is one of the main reasons behind the decision of the Odessa Regional State Administration to form a Bulgarian centre, which throughout its existence has been subordinate to the department of culture, nationalities, religion and cultural heritage sites protection in Odessa Oblast, and is financed by the regional budget.

"Over the past 25 years, the dedicated work of the Bulgarian center's staff has been recognized on many occasions at local, district, regional and state levels. Every year it has been awarded with honorary diplomas for its contribution to the preservation of the culture, native language, traditions and customs of the Bulgarians in Bessarabia, as well as for the promotion of spiritual values among the young generation of Bulgarians," said the Centre's Director, Galina Ivanova.

Ms. Ivanova, the Bulgarian Cultural Centre is 25 years old. What are your team's main tasks?

The work of such an institution is related to the celebration of all traditional and national holidays of the Bulgarian people, as well as Ukrainian national holidays. Of course, we also participate in events that are organized in Bessarabia. Our main focus is educational, teaching and cultural-research activities. This consists primarily in the promotion of Bulgarian culture and language, revival of Bulgarian traditions, rites and customs. As a form of work we have chosen festivals, exhibitions, competitions, meetings with various figures in the fields of science and culture. The Centre is home to the Detelina [Clover] children's folklore ensemble.



Five collections titled Bulgarian Bessarabia have been published on the Centre's initiative. You have other publications as well. What's their theme?

Since 2002, the Centre has been active in publishing. It has published 12 books. These are mainly collections of articles and materials related to conferences and round tables organized by us. A series of five collections of Bulgarian Bessarabia deals with issues of language and literature, history and art of the Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova. Another book published by us is Orthodox Churches in Bulgarian and Gagauz Villages in Ukraine and Moldova. It is based on data from archives and deals with the construction and work of churches in Bulgarian and Gagauz villages. These publications mainly focus on



history, culture, folklore and literature about the Bulgarians in Bessarabia.

The Bulgarian Centre revived some Bulgarian holidays in Bolhrad and the region - such as St. Tryphon's Day, St. George's Day and St. Nicholas' Day. How did you come up with the idea?

The Bulgarian people have always lived here with their holidays, customs and rituals. But time brings its own adjustments and the material side of life takes priority. The aim of the team is to restore the memory of the past times and to freshen up the black-and-white pages of our existence. The greatest wealth of our region is its people - hard-working and hospitable, pure-hearted and very open. This is evidenced by all the events we have held with their help. During these years we have revived traditional holidays such as Babinden [Midwives' Day], St. Tryphon's Day, Baba Marta [March 1], Lazarus Saturday, Easter, St. George's Day, St. Nicholas' Day, etc., almost across Bolhrad Region. We are proud of the fact that most of the holidays initiated by us became part of the holiday calendar of the region and the Oblast.

In the Bulgarian Centre you have a corner set up as a traditional Bulgarian house where you hold meetings with visitors.

That is one of our achievements. The Bulgarian house corner was created in the Centre with the help of the Konstantinov family from the



village of Horodnie. It recreates the lifestyle of the Bessarabian Bulgarians in the 1930s - 1960s. The exhibits are collected from a number of villages and are quite valuable. The meetings in the "Bulgarian House" are one of the main methods of work in the Centre.

For years, the Center has been running courses in Bulgarian language and literature, as well as the history of the Bulgarian people. You also have one of the largest libraries of literature from the Bulgarian classics in the Bulgarian language.

For 23 years now, the Center for Bulgarian Culture has been organizing and conducting courses on Bulgarian language, literature and history for those wishing to apply to higher education institutions in Ukraine and Bulgaria. Full of hope and desire to study in Bulgaria or Ukraine, the applicants meet



once a week for classes on topics included in the application questionnaire. A positive result of this preparation is the admission of our high school graduates in Bulgarian universities.

Your cooperation with State and non-government organizations from Ukraine and Bulgaria during these 25 years has been quite extensive.

The Centre is affiliated with the the department of culture, nationalities, religion and cultural heritage sites protection in Odessa Oblast. We have many joint initiatives with the department of culture, tourism, youth and sports under the Bolhrad Municipal Council and the Bolhrad G. S. Rakovski High School [named after Bulgarian revolutionary Georgi S. Rakovski (1821-1867)], as well as with Bulgarian societies and organizations from the region. We cooperate with the Consulate

General of Bulgaria in Odessa, the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, the Ministry of Culture, the Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, etc. Together with research assistants from the Ethnographic Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia we have participated in field expeditions to collect the folklore of the Bessarabian Bulgarians. We also work with the non-government sector in Bulgaria - the Center for Bessarabian Bulgarians in Sofia, the Rodolyubets [patriot] cultural and educational society for Bessarabian and Tavrian Bulgarians in Sofia.

During the period of its existence, which is 25 years, the Centre has become a real hub of Bulgarian culture in Bessarabia. The team is dedicated to promote the achievements of Bulgarian and Bessarabian artists of different generations - musicians, singers, dancers, artists, writers, translators, scientists. The Centre is the place where the Bessarabian Bulgarians get to know the world of our culture, the world of Bulgarian folklore, customs and traditions. With its exhibitions, concerts, book presentations, interdisciplinary conferences, as well as its participation in prestigious international art festivals, with its folklore performances, the Bulgarian Centre is everywhere - in the fields, town squares, in the country yards, and on the biggest stages and exhibition halls. The team at the Centre is always where it is needed. Let us hope that there will be peace so that we can carry out all our plans.



Archive Photos by the Bolhrad Regional Centre for Bulgarian Culture

G. S. Rakovski School in Bolhrad: the First Bulgarian Secondary School outside Bulgaria

Svetlana Dragneva

The high school in Bolhrad, Ukraine, is the oldest Bulgarian high school dating from the National Revival. After the Crimean War, Bolhrad became part of the Principality of Moldavia, together with another 40 or so Bulgarian colonies. In January 1858, a delegation from these colonies approached Prince Nicolae Vogoride for permission to open a Bulgarian school in what was then Bolhrad. Noted Bulgarian National Revival figure Georgi Rakovski, who was in Iasi at that time, also helped and on June 10, 1858 Prince Vogoride issued a charter on the establishment of a National Central School in

Bolhrad, complete with provisions for funding and statute. Education was accessible to all colonists, regardless of their material status and all subjects were taught in Bulgarian and Romanian. All communities pooled in the funding and it was managed by a board of three delegates of the colonies elected for three-year terms. The school was reopened in 1993 and named after its eminent sponsor, G.S. Rakovski, in 1999.

Following is an account of G.S. Rakovski High School Headmistress Snezhana Skorich about its achievements and its future:



School Headmistress Snezhana Skorich

Reopened in 1993, the school in Bolhrad became the flagman of Bulgarian self-awareness in Ukraine. How does it fare today?

Today the school is a modern educational institution that harmoniously combines the historical experience of generations and modern innovations, as well as the spiritual, cultural and national values of the Ukrainian and Bulgarian people. Over the 19 years since its reopening, it has become a regional cultural and educational centre of Bulgarians in Ukraine, with staff also supported by teachers sent by the Education Ministry in Bulgaria.

The school has 523 students from 18 settlements in Bolhrad region (inhabited mainly by Bulgarians – author's note), as well as others in Odessa Oblast. It has a boardinghouse for students from remote areas and free transport to the nearby villages. One of the main reasons motivating attendance is the desire to study Bulgarian language and literature, history, customs and traditions.



The school has numerous partners in local and state institutions, as well as NGOs in both Ukraine and Bulgaria. As a result, it takes part in European projects, expands prospects before the children and the teachers, and their participation in international seminars, festivals and conferences in Bulgaria, as well as to visit the European Parliament in Brussels.

Bolhrad High School always wins the most prizes in national and regional Bulgarian language competitions. For years, the largest number of applicants to study at Bulgarian higher educational institutions are your school students. What is the explanation for that?

Above all, the availability of a modern educational environment aimed at giving quality education to gifted students. It is true that for years, students of the Bolhrad High School have excelled in Ukrainian regional and national Bulgarian language Olympiads, which carries a bursary from the Ukrainian president. They are also entitled to enroll in Bulgarian universities without entrance exams. This attests to the high qualification and professionalism of the teaching staff, as well as the high standard of teaching of the subjects at the school. I would like to stress, that the professionalism of our staff is also confirmed by the fact that our teachers are authors and co-authors of curricula and textbooks in Bulgarian language and literature, as well as provide qualified scientific and methodological assistance to teachers from other secondary schools teaching Bulgarian language and literature.

Our teachers drafted curricula on the history of Bulgaria and a special course "Traditions and customs of the Bulgarians", which were approved by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine.

When forming their future professional interests, our graduates very often choose European education in Bulgaria. Even after they graduate, we remain in constant contact with them and rejoice in their success.

The school has unique facilities for teaching Bulgarian language and literature, history and culture of the Bulgarian people. You have a school museum and even your own newspaper. Tell us about them.

The Bolhrad High School has always been equipped very well. We have specially equipped classrooms for all fundamental subjects and for Bulgarian language and literature, history and culture of the Bulgarian people, and two computer classrooms. An interactive foyer and remote learning office were unveiled in 2018 on the occasion of the school's 160th anniversary and the facade of the building, which is a monument of architecture, was rehabilitated.

There are three halls for extracurricular activities, including a dance hall and a gym, a Bulgarian ethnographic room, one for Bulgarian folk music and a children's centre. In addition, it has its own museum of the school history, which boasts a number of historical archival documents and exhibits, including a copy of the Prince Vogoride Charter issued on June 10, 1858.

The school has its own newspaper, Zravei [Hello!], published by the students in several languages.

I would like to add a few words about the equipment of the school in the first years after its establishment in the 19th century. The first library then received all Bulgarian, Russian, Czech, Serbian, Romanian, German, French and English



periodicals. It also possessed complete collections of original works of world classics. In 1861, equipment was purchased in Prague for the printing house established at the school, which served not only the school but also the whole of Bessarabia. In 1864, a boarding school was opened to accommodate students from remote villages as well as from Macedonia, Bulgaria and Thrace. The school had its own observatory, meteorological station, collection of paintings, wind instruments. The physics laboratory was equipped with devices purchased in Europe, many of which still work.

The best students went on to study at Europe's best universities in Europe. The school was financed through the profits from common properties which included five lakes, two bridges across the Danube and five restaurants. If we draw a parallel with today, our educational institution is financed by the regional budget, which allows us to improve and update the existing material and educational facilities every year.

Since 2016, your school has participated in a state experiment, "Educating high school students in a multicultural environment", which ends this year. What is the outcome?

As we consider Ukraine's European and world integration, and the development of civic society are possible in the conditions of multicultural education of the individual, by an order of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education our school was awarded the status of a national-level experimental educational establishment. From 2016 until 2022, the high school in Bolhrad was part of a research project on education in a multicultural environment. The result is that the teachers have drafted a general outline of education applicable to schools with students from different ethnicities, already approved by the Ukrainian Education Ministry and recommended for such schools.

In connection with the new legislative changes in Ukrainian education, the high school is also about to change its statutes and name. Has a decision been made on this?

As the first Bulgarian secondary school beyond Bulgarian territory, the G.S. Rakovski High School is very important to Ukraine and Bulgaria. This makes us highly responsible before the public and the official institutions of Ukraine and Bulgaria.

After the adoption of Ukraine's laws on education and on full general secondary education, the large Bulgarian diaspora in Ukraine was worried whether the status of the high school would be preserved. For several years, the administration of the school had repeated meetings and appeals to various institutions to resolve the case.

It is crucial for the school to preserve the existing three-stage structure of education: initial (grades 1-4), primary (grades 5-9) and secondary (grades 10-12), as well as the opportunity to



enroll students from the whole Odessa Oblast. This will allow the children to study their native language and literature from the 1st to the 12th grade. Continuing funding from the regional budget and the years of cooperation with Bulgaria are also of prime importance.

The Odessa Oblast Council included the G.S. Rakovski school in the list of agreements in education on June 3, 2022.

The G. S. Rakovski High School in Bolhrad is the cultural and educational bridge between Ukraine and Bulgaria. The school is included in the contractual base in the field of education.

From a historical point of view, the graduates of the Bolhrad High School are the foundation of the construction and

restoration of the new Bulgarian state after the Liberation. They are inscribed in golden letters in Bulgarian history, individuals who contributed to Bulgarian science, culture, military capacity, justice, music and literature. These are Alexander Malinov, Georgi Todorov, Danail Nikolaev, Dimitar Grekov, Ivan Kolev, Dimitar Agura, Alexander Teodorov-Balan, Ivan Vulpe and many others. Many of the school's students were volunteers in the Russo-Turkish War of Liberation of 1877-1878.

Today's students not only study Bulgarian language, literature, Bulgarian history, traditions and customs, but also revive and popularize Bulgarian music and Bulgarian folk dances. Together with their parents, they become involved in Bulgarian national culture, participating in the school calendar of traditional holidays, performing in various Bulgarian national competitions, festivals and contests. It has become a tradition



at the school to celebrate the following dates - the Day of Bessarabian Bulgarians, the Bulgarian Enlighteners Day, Bulgaria Liberation Day, the anniversary of Georgi Rakovski's birthday, and the day of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius (May 24).

Regional seminars for teachers of Bulgarian language and literature from Bessarabia and all over Ukraine are held at the school. The high school is a place that brings together representatives of various state institutions of Ukraine and Bulgaria. The high school is visited by presidents, prime ministers, ministers, MPs.

For years, the Bolhrad High School has been running the information and applicant campaign for studying in the universities of Bulgaria. For over 20 years now, our graduates who became students in Bulgaria are already competitive and qualified specialists in Bulgaria and Ukraine. Both cooperation and links were made possible by interstate contractual basis in the field of education

The school prides itself on the Horo dance and the Zdravets folk song ensembles, doesn't it?

We have many clubs for the development of students' creative abilities, among which the Horo folk dance ensemble and the Zdravets folk song ensemble take pride of place.

Horo was established in 2001 and is headed by experts sent by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education – Veska Kozoukova, Ognyan Alexiev, Assoc. Prof. Krasimir Petrov, Danail Tzolov, Peter Dimitrov and Margarita Bratoeva. In 2016 the ensemble was merited as exemplary and in 2021, thanks to the participants' dancing skills and choreography, Horo was awarded the National Dance Ensemble distinction. The same year the ensemble marked its 20th anniversary.

The Zdravets folk song ensemble was established in 1997. It is also headed by teachers sent by the Bulgarian Education Ministry – Paskal Bakalov, Dancho Radoulov, Krasimir Kondov, Dimitar Stoev and Dimitar Rusev. In 2009 the ensemble was distinguished as exemplary, and in 2020 – as a National Folk Song Ensemble.



The stage performances of both ensembles are always vivid and unforgettable. Horo and Zdravets are active participants in various events, competitions and festivals. They are prize-winners of the Pure Dew All-Ukrainian Festival Competition, the Palette of Bulgarian Talents Regional Children and Youth Festival, the With Bulgaria in the Heart International Folk Festival in Kavarna, Bulgaria, and the International Children's Easter Festival in Bosilegrad, Serbia.

What are the pressing issues you have to address, along with the successes already achieved?

The most important issue to be resolved is the renewal of the existing Memorandum between the Ministry of Education of Ukraine and the Bulgarian Ministry of Education concerning the Bolhrad High School. The timely resolution of this case will contribute to a balanced and tolerant policy towards the Bulgarians in Ukraine, the support of our linguistic and cultural-educational needs, which will contribute to the strengthening of Ukrainian-Bulgarian relations. It will also preserve the socio-political stability in the region, for the residents of which the Bolhrad school is also an

educational and cultural centre of the Bulgarian community.

The founding of the high school back in 1858 was not an easy task, the school went through many historical periods in different countries, but managed even in such conditions to retain its specificity and uniqueness. The newly signed Memorandum will confirm the special status and unique character of the Bolhrad High School in the system of full general secondary education in Ukraine.

I am confident that both on the issue of the new status of the high school and the new protocol, we will find understanding and support from all necessary institutions in Ukraine and Bulgaria. I would like to thank BTA for the opportunity to speak about us and to promote the name of the G.S. Rakovski High School in Bolhrad.



Archive Photos by The G.S. Rakovski High School in Bolhrad

Prof. Nikolay Chervenkov, historian, Bulgarian studies expert and public figure:

I am Glad that my Work Motivated the Opening of Vasil Levski's Monument in Moldova

Svetlana Dragneva



Nikolay Chervenkov - Professor and Doctor of Historical Sciences, is a prominent historian, public figure and Bulgarian studies expert, who stands out as one of the most prominent figures in the movement of revival of the Bulgarian community in Ukraine and Moldova in recent decades.

Professor Chervenkov was born in the Bulgarian village of Horodnie in the Bolhrad region. In 1972 he graduated from the Odessa University's Faculty of History. In 1982 he defended his dissertation on Bulgarian emigration to Romania and the national liberation movement in Bulgaria in the second half of the 1850s and the early 1860s. He specialized at the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

From 1972 to 2004 he worked at the Academy of Sciences of Moldova, first at the Institute of History as a junior, then as senior research fellow, head of the Department of History of Southeastern European States, and later at the Institute of Interethnic Studies as a senior research fellow, head of the Section of Bulgarian Studies, and deputy director.

For many years he was a visiting associate professor at the Moldovan State University and the Ion Creanga State Pedagogical University. In 2003, he was appointed Professor at the University of Sofia. Nikolay Chervenkov defended his habilitation thesis on the formation of the ideas of Bulgarian statehood from the mid-1700s to the 1870s.

Between 2004 and 2010 Nikolay Chervenkov was elected the first rector of the Gregory Tsamblak State University in Taraclia, Moldova.

The scientific contribution of Prof. Chervenkov is evidenced by his authorship and co-authorship of more than 150 articles, studies, books, documentary collections and textbooks. He is the author of dozens of monographs and about 200 scientific articles. He is the head of international scientific projects and conferences.

His public activity is marked by his work as President of the Academic Bulgarian Studies Association in Moldova and as an active member of the Board of the Rodolyubets [patriot] Society - Sofia. He was elected a member of the governing bodies of the Bulgarian Community in Moldova, the Vasil Levski General Bulgarian Committee, etc. Prof. Chervenkov has been repeatedly awarded with high state and government honors for his scientific work and activism, including the Moldova's Order of Work Glory, Bulgaria's Order of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, First Class, the Marin Drinov badge of honour of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, recognitions by the St. Kliment Ohridski University, the Moldovan Academy of Sciences and the General Bulgarian Committee Vasil Levski.

Prof. Chervenkov, you turn 75 in 2023. How do you see your achievements and your accomplishments in terms of science and research?

– During an anniversary year one truly reflects on what they have accomplished. I would like to say right away that I haven't done much, remembering the plans I had. However, I did manage something. I defended two dissertations, published books and articles for which I did research, first on the revolutionary processes in the Bulgarian Revival, and second, on the ideas and plans for a future Bulgarian statehood.

My main research interests are related to the Bulgarian national liberation movement. Along with that, I was preoccupied with the problems of the Bessarabian Bulgarians - history, culture and contemporary aspects. Some of my published books are about the political organizations of the Bulgarian national liberation movement, the Petro-Pavlovskaya church of the village of Horodnie, historical Bulgarian Studies in the Republic of Moldova, 200 years of Taraclia (co-authored with I. Duminika).

In recent years, I have been involved in the publication of the two books by the Brazilian author George Kosikov, dedicated to the history of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, as a scientific consultant of the translation and author of the preface.

I had to deal with organizational activities when I was the head of the section of Bulgarian studies, deputy director of the Institute of National Minorities at the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, and also First Rector of the Gregory Tsamblak State University in Taraclia. I was also engaged in public work, because I was the president of the Bulgarian Studies Association in Moldova and the director of the Bulgarian Sunday School in Chisinau.

You were born in the Ukrainian part of Bessarabia, as a scientist you have been working in Moldova, and all your life you have been connected to Bulgaria, Ukraine and Moldova. Tell us about your roots, your life path. What are pivotal moments that determined the course you life took?

I am fully connected to these countries, and I am devoted and grateful to all three. I was born and bred with Bulgarian ideas and problems in Horodnie, Bolhrad region. In the 6th grade, under the guidance of the yet to become famous Bulgarian Studies expert, Konstantin Poglubko, I was in charge of a history circle in which we studied the history of the Bessarabian Bulgarians. At that time very little was known about them and, frankly, attention to this was not welcome. After the 9th grade, I spent a few weeks with my teacher Poglubko reading in the academic library of Odessa State University. This prompted me to study history at this University. All my coursework and thesis topics were related to Bulgarian history. Then my first attempts at scientific articles appeared. This gave me the opportunity immediately after university to be admitted to one of the sections in the Institute of History in the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, where I was given the chance dedicate myself to Bulgarian studies for more than four years. In Chisinau, at the same time, I became involved in the life of the Bulgarian community, keeping in touch with the Bulgarians and regional scientists in the Odessa Oblast. I'll give you an example that I was a co-organizer and co-author of one



of the first academic publications dedicated to the history and culture of a Bulgarian village in the Odessa region - my native village of Horodnie.

This is one of the largest and best preserved Bulgarian villages in Bessarabia. I am grateful to my patriotic family where I grew up. From a very young age I was raised with everything Bulgarian. Bulgarian and Christian traditions and rituals were strictly observed. My mother was famous as a singer of folk songs. This came from her family which had strong music traditions. My brother Pancho (Stepan), who became a well-known music theorist, worked for a while as deputy director of the Music School in Chisinau and then as director of the Music School in Kotel, Bulgaria.

The atmosphere of "Bulgarianness" surrounded me throughout my school years. Back then we still had choirs, gatherings, a big Bulgarian ensemble, traditional Bulgarian weddings, etc. It made me think about where we were from, who the Bulgarians were.

Your research interests are in the field of history, Slavic studies, interethnic relations. What are you currently working on, and which themes of history are central to your research?

Yes, I am the author and co-author of dozens of monographs, books, collections. I have already emphasized that they are devoted to various Bulgarian problems: the national liberation movement of the Bulgarian people, the participation of the Bessarabian Bulgarians in the liberation movement of the Bulgarians, in the church struggle, local history studies, the place of the Bulgarians in the public life of Bessarabia, etc. I am grateful that my modest scientific and public activity has been recognized with various awards, above all with Moldova's Order of Work Glory and Bulgaria's Order of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, First Class.

Although less actively, I am trying to do research and journalistic work even now. The Historical Bulgarian Studies in the Republic of Moldova book was published. At the moment I am working on the preparation of collections that will include my articles on the history of the Bulgarian Revival, as well as articles published in periodicals. Now I am also working on a collection dedicated to the history of the Bessarabian Bulgarians in Brazil. I am preparing a series of articles dedicated to prominent Bessarabian Bulgarians. Many colleagues are waiting for my memoirs about the activities of the Bulgarian community in Moldova in the last thirty years.

The Academic Bulgarian Studies Association in Moldova was established 29 years ago and you headed it for a long time. Has the Association's task been fulfilled from a historical standpoint?

The Association was established in 1994 on the initiative of a group of Moldovan experts in Bulgarian Studies, including Assoc. Prof. Ivan Grek, Prof. Nikolay Rusev, Assoc. Prof. Nadezhda Kara, Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Chelak, among others. We were faced with many tasks of an organizational and educational nature, among others. The Association became a true centre of Bulgarian Studies in the country and abroad.

The Association has defined as its most important task research in the field of history, culture and language of the Bulgarian people, Moldovan-Bulgarian relations, as well as the promotion of research activities in the public domain. Furthermore, the aim of the Association is to assist and provide scientific support to Bulgarian organizations and institutions there. Throughout its existence, the Association has been working in several research areas: study and functioning of the Bulgarian language in Moldova, archaeology and culture, local history, sociological studies, etc.

I cannot say that all goals have been achieved. However, we have a lot to be proud of. For these nearly thirty years, under the Association's umbrella, we have more than 50 published books, 14 completed national and international sociological and local history projects. The Bulgarian Horizons periodical was published over the course of a few years, and now we maintain a website of the Association. We are glad that, with our support, many young people studied for PhDs and defended dissertations in Moldova and Bulgaria. For more than a year, the Association has a new President - Ivan Duminika, PhD in Historical Sciences, who is taking new interesting directions in its activities - affiliates are being established, projects are being implemented to preserve and create monuments in Moldova related to Bulgarian history, etc.

To date, the Association has successfully carried out three main tasks: studying the history and culture of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, promotion of their historical and cultural heritage, studying and developing Moldovan-Bulgarian relations.

You published, together with Prof. Ivan Grek, the first history of the resettlement of the Bessarabian Bulgarians - Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova: Past and Present. This is a very up-to-date book that gives a comprehensive picture of this part of Bulgarian history.

In recent years, quite a few publications have come out of print that reveal various aspects of the history of the Bessarabian Bulgarians. However, this book, The Bulgarians of Ukraine and Moldova: Past and Present (1993), remains one of the works that summarizes the history of the Bulgarians of Ukraine and Moldova. It serves as a textbook both for Bessarabian Bulgarian students and in Bulgaria itself. We are grateful to the Roden Krai [homeland] newspaper, which reprinted the book in full on its pages, making it accessible to a broad range of readers.

Photos: Facebook pages and Nikolay Chervenkov's personal archive
Rodolyubets Society - Sofia Scientific Bulgarian Studies Association in Moldova

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the hanging of Vasil Levski. You are one of the first historians from Ukraine and Moldova to research the topic - Levski and Bessarabia. What have you been able to discover?

I have been intrigued by Vasil Levski for a long time, and I wanted our fellow Bulgarians in Ukraine and Moldova to get acquainted with his heroic work. Especially for the students in the course "History, Culture and Traditions of the Bulgarian People", which is taught in schools with students of Bulgarian origin in Moldova, I have prepared and published a popular science book titled "Vasil Levski". The work on this book led me to research his connections with his compatriots in Bessarabia and Tavia. It turned out that there were such. Particularly enduring were those with Olimpiy Panov, a native of Taraclia, who was secretary of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee, with Mikhail Grekov, with whom he had collaborated since 1862. I am glad that my humble discoveries were used as motivation for the opening of a bust-monument to Vasil Levski in the town of Tvardita [located in present-day Moldova and founded after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–1829 by Bulgarian refugees from the southern Bulgarian town of Tvarditsa and the surrounding region]. We hold conferences in the country dedicated to the Apostle [Vasil Levski is known in Bulgaria and among Bulgarians as the Apostle of Freedom]. The materials from one meeting have been published in a separate collection - The Immortality of Vasil Levski (2008).

What is your message to young historians?

First of all, I would like to see more young compatriots in Bulgarian studies. Much has already been covered, especially in the last thirty years. However, many aspects still remain that were not touched upon before, often for political reasons and the inaccessibility of archives. Researchers are practically no longer confronted with these problems. And yet, thankfully, there is a growing interest among the [Bulgarian] society in its past. All this, I hope, will stimulate an interest among young people, be it as professionals or simply as local historians, to look deeply into the past and present of the Bessarabian Bulgarians. I hope they will be objective, comprehensively research the existing literature and be critical of the sources.



Niko Stoyanov, a poet, publicist and translator: Bulgaria Was a Dream that Came True

Svetlana Dragneva

Niko Stoyanov was born on January 9, 1947 in the village of Nova Ivanovka, Odessa Oblast. He completed his higher education at Kharkiv State University, majoring in Russian and Ukrainian philology. His first book was translated and published in Ukrainian in Kharkiv in 1973.

He is the author of 18 collections of poetry, including *Hello* (1976), *Thank You* (1979), *Divine Pain* (1983), *I, the Bulgarian* (1999), *Textbook of Patriotism, Bessarabian Bulgarian Poetry, Bessarabian Bulgarian Prose, By the Spring, One Hundred Sonnets, In the Beginning Was the Word, Autumn Blooms*, among others. He is the screenwriter of 20 documentaries, among which is the first film about the Bessarabian Bulgarians *In the Green Steppe of Budzhak...* (1982). He translates texts from Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan.

Niko Stoyanov's poetry has been translated into Russian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, Estonian, Armenian, Azeri, Turkish and Hungarian.

He is the founder and editor-in-chief of the first newspaper in the USSR of Bessarabian Bulgarians – *Rodno Slovo* (native word). The Bulgarian newspaper started circulation in 1988 in Chisinau.

In 2015, the book *In the Beginning Was the Word* was published, which collects his publications in *Rodno slovo*.

He is a recipient of the numerous awards from Moldova and Bulgaria. He also has been recognized on many occasions for his participation in Bulgarian and international poetry competitions.

Many Bulgarian, Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan authors have written about Niko Stoyanov's work. Among them are Andrey Germanov, Ivan Sestrinsky, Strakhil Popov, Elena Nalbantova, Strashimir Tsanov, Alexander Milanov, Ivan Granitsky, Oleg Shestinsky, Dmytro Bilous, Mikhail Dihan, Mihai Chimpoi, Gheorghe Vode.

Niko Stoyanov's poetic works are a unique and moving image of his love for his kin, homeland and ancestry, a confession of the sacred things that are the solid foundation of Bulgarian unity. As a truly talented artist he has his poetic emblem - the poem *Stay Bulgarian*.

He is a member of the Union of Writers of Moldova and the Union of Bulgarian Writers.



He participated in the life of the Sofia-based Rodolyubets Society for Cultural Relations with the Bulgarians of Bessarabia and Tavia.

Stoyanov's works are included in textbooks on Bulgarian language and literature published in Moldova and Ukraine. He is a screenwriter of documentary films about Bessarabian Bulgarians.

Your poem Stay Bulgarian has become symbolic for the Bulgarians in Ukraine and Moldova.

Yes, it was written a while ago. This poem has become popular, it has become a landmark. I can say that I no longer feel it as my own. Every Bessarabian Bulgarian can see himself in it, so I define it as folk. When I wrote it, I did not think it would become such. I wrote about what interested me - the historical memory of the Bulgarians.

When did you start writing poetry for the first time?

I have been writing in Russian and Bulgarian since my early childhood, but I started writing in Bulgarian seriously when the time to publish came.

In what language are you thinking and writing?

In Bulgarian, of course. The Bulgarian in me is primary. I only spoke Bulgarian until I was seven – the archaic dialect in which we speak in Bessarabia. As a university student I found myself in a Russian environment. I started studying the standard Bulgarian language. I needed this not only as a poet, but as the editor-in-chief of *Rodno Slovo* Bulgarian newspaper which was published in Chisinau.

Who guided and supported you along your path to poetry?

That would be Bulgarian poet Andrey Germanov, whom I met in the early 1970s. When I was a student in Kharkiv in 1973, I published a collection of poems translated into Ukrainian. I sent it to Andrey Germanov, who back then was the editor of the *Plamak* (Flame) magazine. In 1974, he wrote me a very exciting letter. I sent him a folder containing poems and published them in the first edition of *Plamak* in 1975 with a prologue that I included

in my first poetry collection. When I visited Sofia, I met with him to discuss poetry. He is my teacher of poetry, who encouraged me.

You have quite a few poetry collections. What were the first ones and what are you working on now?

My first poetry collection is titled *Hello* the second one is *Thank You* and the third one *Divine Pain*. The book *Flowers for Mom* was published afterwards, followed by *Two Loves, One Sweetheart*. My books are emblematic to me and I remember them all. I write about the topics that excite through the prism of time. One of the main themes is related to the fate of the Bulgarian settlers in Bessarabia. I have been writing sonnets in recent years and have completed 75 of them already, which are yet to be published.

You created the first Bulgarian newspaper Rodno Slovo in Chisinau. Tell us about it and what happened.

Its first edition was published in 1988. Its goals are to reach readers in Bulgarian, to work for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, to introduce the past and present of the Bulgarian people, etc. The newspaper back then had readers throughout the country. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the publication was subsidized by the Moldovan government. "Rodno Slovo became a spiritual bridge between Bulgarians divided by territorial borders. When funding stopped, the newspaper was printed irregularly and was dedicated to significant events and dates. This rarely happens now.

What's "the little homeland" to you and what's Bulgaria?

The house I grew up in, my Bulgarian Nova Ivanovka, are my "Small Homeland", but capitalized. In the past, Bulgaria was a dream. Now I live here and that dream came true.



Aleksandr Kara, painter: My Body Is in Bessarabia, my Spirit Is in Bulgaria!

Svetlana Dragneva

Bulgarian artist Aleksandr Kara was born in 1956 in the village of Novi Troyany, Bolhrad District. He turned to painting in his childhood and devoted nearly all his free time to art. He studied at the Faculty of Arts and Graphics with K. D. Ushinsky South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University between 1977 and 1982.

He lives and works in Izmail, Ukraine. He studied mural painting at St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria, 2003, class of D. Zaimov). Became a professor of drawing and painting at the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Izmail in 1989. Became an associate professor at the Fine Arts Department of Izmail State University of Humanities.

Chair of the city chapter of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine since 2008. Participant in international plein-air workshops and exhibitions since 1992. Has more than 20 solo exhibitions, including in Odessa (1995, 2008), the National Art Gallery in Sofia (2005), the National Assembly (2005), Crimean Republican Institution Livadia Palace-Museum (Yalta, 2007), the Consulate General of Bulgaria in Odessa (2008), the Kyiv State Historical Museum (2012). Participated in more than 160 both in Ukraine and outside the country. Honoured with 11 prestigious awards for his art, including Merited Artist of Ukraine in 2012.

Author of 43 publications, including 9 scientific, 31 creative and 3 methodological collections. Participant in the international plein air workshops Golden Orpheus (Bulgaria, 1992), Saint Luke (Bulgaria, 1996), Osojnica (North Macedonia, 1997), Tokmakli (Bulgaria, 2005) and more.

Public activist, curator of the international biennale of children's creativity Children of Bessarabia and the national plein air workshop Budjaskaya Palette since 1998. Person of the Year laureate in 2005, nominated by the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine in the Painting category. Actively participates in international exhibitions, creative meetings of artists of the Lower Danube.

His works can be seen in a number of institutions, such



as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Art Gallery in Sofia, the National Assembly, the library of the University of Veliko Tarnovo, as well as the Contemporary Art Center in North Macedonia. His paintings are also exhibited in the Izmail Art Gallery, the All-Ukrainian Centre for Bulgarian Culture in Odessa, in private collections and in galleries in Ukraine, Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Canada, USA, Russia among others.

Izmail art critics wrote about him: "The artist's life includes his mother's tales that he was told throughout his childhood, the joy of his family in Novi Troyany, the landscapes of his dear Budjak, his art classes in Odessa, his touch with Bulgarian classics (in spirit,

the artist is close to Ivan Milev). All this is just the visible part of creating paintings. The other side remains hidden, like magic. This magic turns us into individuals, who trust the goodness in this world, and gives us a feeling of peace under the sun. Kara's works captivate with the lightness of their subject. His paintings introduce us to the life that Bulgarians in Bessarabia live – 'a new land under a new sky.'" His peers appreciate him as an original artist.

His compositions gravitate around Bessarabia. Preferred painting techniques: oil, encaustic, painting characterized by imagery, poetics, use of laconic means, combination of modern trends with the Orthodox Christian traditions of Kyivan Rus' and Bulgaria.

Each of the artist's paintings contains a piece of eternity. The artist's Bessarabian Madonnas are distinguished not by their magnificent Renaissance shapes, but by their eyes that are full of tenderness and kindness. Kara learned to paint them after studying Orthodox icons. Some experts call Kara the Bessarabian Modigliani. Like the great Italian painter, Kara painted practically no landscapes or still lifes.

Kara's successful career had him achieve universal recognition from top-level experts of the post-Soviet community and in Europe. His painting *Communion* was included in the album *Ukrainian Painting in the Early 21st Century*.



Stoyanov was distinguished by the Agency for Bulgarians abroad for his dedicated work for the unity of Bulgarians abroad (Photo: Academic Society of Bulgarian Studies in Moldova, Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad)

During the 1918-1938 period, much literature was published in the Bulgarian language in Ukraine. The books were mainly printed in Moscow, Kyiv, Kharkiv, where there were Bulgarian sections in the respective publishing houses. More than 1,150 titles were published during this period. In this way, Bulgarian fiction gradually began to be written in Ukraine. In 1931 a Bulgarian section was founded in Kharkiv, then the capital of Ukraine, under the Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers, which was later incorporated into the Union of Writers of the USSR. From 1932 to 1934 the young Bulgarian writers published the literary almanacs *First Strike* and *Impetus* (upsurge). Bulgarian writers in the 1930s created a rich ideological and artistic literature. Among them was the novelist Nikola Fuklev (1908-1938), author of journalistic books, a collection of short stories and the novel *On Gilded Ground* (the first volume was published in 1934). In the same year, the short story collection *With Full Speed* by Ivan Mavrodi (1911 - 1981) was published by Katarzyna Gino. The talented poet, Ivan Gedikov, from Inzovka (1912 - 1936) published a book of poems *Poems*. Other poets and writers published their works in Bulgarian, among them Nikola Shimov from Radolovka and Dimitar Markov. In this period two books were published by

the most significant writer of prose from the circles of Bulgarians in Ukraine - Misho Hadzhiyski. One of them is *The Nights Near Lozovatka*. Anna Preslavska (Glavcheva) (1909-1938), one of the first local Bulgarian literary critics, also published her articles. Many of these Bulgarian writers were arrested and shot in 1938.

No books were printed in Bulgarian in Ukraine between 1938 and 1967.

Bulgarian literature got a second impetus with the *My Southern Plain* collection, published in 1967. Its author, Petar Burlak-Vulkanov (1939-2005) was born in the village of Ostrivne (Babata), Odessa Oblast. He has published over 10 collections, including Bessarabian poet Niko Stoyanov's *Hello* was published in 1976.

The ranks of Bulgarian poets and writers among the Bulgarian community in Ukraine have been filled with talented creative people. Some of the most famous are: Mikhail Bachvarov-Bondar, Vladimir Kaloyanov, Ivan Nenov, Ivan Vulkov, Todor Stoyanov, Tanya Tanasova Todorova, Georgi Barbarov, among any others. The works of all these writers reflect the life of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, they are filled with respect and adoration for traditions, with love for the native land and family.



You were born in the patriarchal Bulgarian village Novi Troyany in Bessarabia. When did you start to consider painting as a possible career choice?

My native village, the Bulgarian Novi Troyany, is situated on three hills, which present a magnificent view of the Bessarabian steppe, vineyards and the Katlabukh River. All this formed my romantic perception of nature and the realities of rural life.

My father Dimitar was a creative person, he made works of decorative and applied art. He weaved on a loom, he made jugs and wooden pots.

My favourite childhood memory is the feeling I had, when my parents bought me an expensive set of drawing pencils. My childhood passion for drawing determined my goal to study at the K. D. Ushinsky South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University in Odessa. My neighbours, who had a pragmatic approach to life, were wondering: "Studying to be an artist? Go for a vet instead. Then, you will always have meat at home". Still, my parents supported me, for which I am sincerely grateful. Otherwise I wouldn't be who I am today.

I stayed true to my dream and got a degree in art. After that, I worked as an art teacher in several schools in the Tarutyn area for several years. In 1989, I started work at the then Izmil National Pedagogical Institute.

You are the author of a series of paintings, which depict themes and motifs related to the traditional life

and folk calendar of the Bulgarians in Bessarabia. What inspired you?

It's all the memories of childhood. I was born and brought up in a Bulgarian traditional environment, I would call it patriarchal. And this has always manifested in my work both as a student and later. The Bulgarian spirit has been in me and with me all my life. That is why the main themes in my early work are my childhood memories of my mother and father, the way of life and traditions of the Bulgarians in Bessarabia. These are my paintings Settlers, Village Feast, Village Song, Childhood Memories, Memorial Day, Family Meal, Saint George's Day, Baba Marta, etc. The painting Horo (2008) presents the symbolism of the horo dance as a figurative and graceful embodiment of the Bulgarian national character and the emergence of unity among Bulgarians.

Female figures, more specifically the Bessarabian Madonnas, represent a significant share of your body of work.

Yes, art critics call them the Bessarabian Madonnas. The image of woman again comes from my childhood memories. The Bulgarian woman is the bringer of beauty. Female figures are imprinted in my memory as modest, slender, graceful, hard-working. Indeed, my work is dominated by female images. These are my paintings

Muse, Vine, Bessarabian Girls. The figures are dressed in traditional folk costumes. My mother Ivanka Kara is an ideal of the female devotion and guardian of family harmony. Her image is present in Portrait of a Mother (1990) and is central in the triptych Woman from Troyan (1996). The female figure in the painting Threads from the Past also comes from a childhood memory of my mother weaving on a loom over the winter. Symbolism is very important to me. And I can say that the images I create are close to realism.

Your famous painting The First Furrow – On a New Land Under a New Sky is a signature piece of yours. What is the story of its creation?

The First Furrow (2015) has been exhibited in many Ukrainian and foreign exhibitions and is now in the private collection of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In it, I present an artistic embodiment of the folklore of the Bessarabian Bulgarians. The idea for this painting came about under the influence of a Christmas song recorded in Taraclia, Moldova, by Ancho Koloyanov, Ph.D., who is a professor at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. Some of the lyrics go as follows:

Green tree by a black sea
With a bird that chirps atop it.
Four oxen ploughing
With silver horns and golden mouths.
Saint Peter leads the way,
Saint George is right behind them,
The Lord is on the plough.
Mary walks ahead of them,
And while she does, she's murmuring:
May farmers see great wheat harvest,
May grape growers see lots of grapes,
May shepherds see rivers of milk!
Praise be, Holy Mary,
Praise to You and to the Lord!

The hard work of the first settlers to cultivate the steppes of Budjak, which until then knew only the animal husbandry of the Nogai Tatars, prompted those settlers to turn for help to the most revered Christian saints: Mary, Peter and George. This was the first time I came across a folk song, in which God himself was ploughing. This made a big impression on me, and I depicted it on canvas. The first Bulgarian colonists in Bessarabia believed in a better future for themselves in the new land, so their imagination formed a sacred mission that they fulfilled by living with prayer in their souls and faith in their hearts. I used elements of folk art to create the frame of this painting. The frame was made from a piece of an authentic weaving loom, the frame of a reed. The background reproduces an authentic version of the carpet as a product of Bulgarian folk weaving. Thus, the artistic concept of the painting The First Furrow reproduces a certain synthesis of my idea, of folklore and decorative applied art.

What is Bulgaria to you?

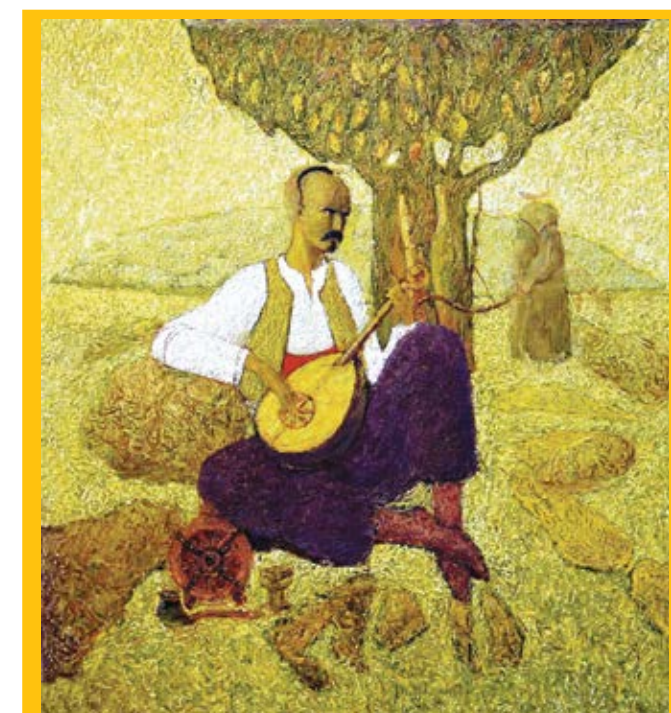
In the late 90s, I visited my ancestral homeland for the first time. I felt great excitement. I studied mural painting at St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo. In those years I unveiled my first solo exhibition in Dobrich, then another in Kyustendil. I visited Gabrovo, Smolyan, Malko Tarnovo. Bulgarian nature, history, people – they are amazing. To answer your question, I can only say my body is in Bessarabia, but my spirit is in Bulgaria!

Which artists would you say had the biggest influence on shaping your own artistic style?

Initially I was influenced by Russian academicism, but I gradually broke free from it. I started to look for new forms, and I think I found my own style. I am attracted to the line, iconographic deformation, symbols that are close to realism. I find it difficult to name specific artists. I have seen reproductions of Ivan Milev. He is a very interesting artist and has good works. During my visit to Kyustendil, I got acquainted with the Vladimir Dimitrov's work. I visited his studio, I saw his grave... An exceptional artist, a great master...

What are you working on now?

I am still on a Bulgarian theme. In recent years, I also created paintings dedicated to Ukraine. Some of my pieces are about the war. When the war started in February 2022, I painted a piece called Warriors of Light. It has not been exhibited yet. I have another one on this topic, but it was painted before the war. It is called Civilization Rupture. As an artist, I cannot remain indifferent and stand on the sidelines. That is why I have to show this in my paintings.



Photos: Aleksandr Kara, personal archive

Liliya Semkova, singer: Bulgarian Folk Song Is my Soul

Svetlana Dragneva

The young Bessarabian singer Liliya Semkova was born in 1994 in the Bulgarian village of Horodnje, Bolhrad District. She became involved with music at the age of 5. She received her musical education at the Odessa School of Art and Culture K. F. Dankevych. Liliya became one of the leading figures in the cultural events of the All-Ukrainian Centre for Bulgarian Culture in Odessa. She participated in the gatherings of Bulgarians organized by the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine. She became known as "the Golden Voice" of Bessarabia.

In 2015, Liliya competed in the TV talent show *Balgariya tarsi talant* (Bulgaria Searches for a Talent), which drove her to move to Bulgaria and enrol at the University of National and World Economy in Sofia. In 2018, she appeared in a Bulgarian reality TV show, where she presented part of the life of Bessarabian Bulgarians.

Liliya has two original songs, *Jalba za Bulgaria* (Grief for Bulgaria), which has over 3,000,000 views on social media, and *Za dobro sabrahme se* (It is good that we gathered). She has collaborated with Royal Band, a band based in Blagoevgrad that performs Macedonian music.

Liliya, you were born in the picturesque Bessarabian Bulgarian village of Horodnje, Bolhrad District. What memories do you have of your childhood? Have you performed in Horodnje?

Horodnje where I was born is considered the most Bulgarian village in Bessarabia. We observe all Bulgarian traditions and customs. We even have a tradition that I have not seen here, *na prat* (on pole - a song procession that is done only at Easter by girls and young women). Our families speak a Bulgarian dialect. The people in our village, just like other Bessarabian Bulgarians, try to preserve the language, culture and traditions.

I have been performing even since I was little. Everybody from my mother's side sang. My grandmother was especially talented. She sang Bulgarian folk songs exceptionally. I studied at the music school in Horodnje. My teacher, Evgeniia Shlopak, believed in me and always encouraged me to strive for success. I performed numerous times with the Bulgarian folk band *Izvor* in the concerts organized by the House of Culture. These are some of my best childhood and teenage memories.



What is Bulgarian folk song to you?

Bulgarian folk song is my soul, my inner self, my joy, my success. It is everything to me.

How do you identify yourself?

I have always been and will always be Bulgarian. No matter where I was born and where I grew up, I am Bulgarian and I am proud of it. The Bulgarian spirit is always in me. Even at the state exam at the school in Odessa, I conducted the Bulgarian folk song *Peperuda* (Butterfly). I felt it important to present myself with a Bulgarian song, as a Bulgarian. I passed the exam with a very high grade. And I think it was because of this that I performed so well. Also, at the entrance exams in Odessa, I was accepted after performing the Bulgarian song of Horodnje *Bogdan Kalinka dumashe* (Bogdan was telling Kalinka). The jury noted this at the time.



What are your professional accomplishments as a singer?

My professional path has always involved many hurdles and hard work both here and in Ukraine. My appearance in the reality show helped me a lot. I performed well, judging by the audience's reaction. This makes me happy. It's been a long time since then, yet people still remember me. This brings me joy. I produced two original songs that have been a great success. *Jalba za Bulgaria* was gifted to me by a friend of mine, the singer Slavena. She composed both the music and the lyrics. My good friends, the musician Stefan Yordanov, arranged the music. Today, the song is played not only in Bulgaria, but also abroad. Many people who live outside Bulgaria loved it. I love working with reliable and talented people. I'm glad that my videos are a success, as they have garnered plenty of views. I also tour, singing at conventions, concerts and private parties. I am happy in Bulgaria, I feel very well and relaxed. Of course, I miss my family. I love them very much. I want to say thank you to my parents and my sister.

Bulgarian settlers in Bessarabia have kept their historical roots and identity, language, way of life and culture for over 200 years. But they also create new songs in Bessarabia today, which is typical of Horodnje in particular. Tell us about the typical songs of Horodnje.

That is true. I know the songs that are typical of our village from my aunt. Her career as a singer in the Bulgarian folk band *Izvor* in Horodnje brought her fame across Bessarabia. There are melodic and colourful songs, such as *Drago mi e, mila mamu* (I am glad, dear

mom), *Snoshti minah* (Last night I passed by), the latter of which I recorded together with Maria Dimitrova. There are also other songs that have a Dobrudzha sound to them. I am planning to record two more songs of *Horodnje* in the future.

You made a video for Bogdan Kalinka dumashe, which became emblematic for Bessarabian Bulgarians.

This song has really become a kind of anthem of Bessarabian Bulgarians. When we were planning the location for the video, I was adamant that it must be the Liberty Memorial on Shipka Peak. The reason is, the lyrics are about Bulgaria under Ottoman rule. My team and I managed to shoot the video during the coldest winter days. The goal was to have the video ready by March 3, Bulgaria's Liberation Day, as a greeting to Bulgaria and its people.

I was feeling reverence and pride. Ascending to the peak was a bit difficult because of the filming equipment, but we managed. I was not cold up there. I was filled with pride and excitement to be at this holy place and to perform this unique song.

Rusan Urmanov arranged the music, Nedyalko Nedyalkov was on kaval, Ateshkhani Yuseinov on guitar, Stefan Yordanov on accordion. Kalin Georgiev did the recording, mixing and mastering. The video was made by Luminar, Pavel Petlichki shot and edited the film, Georgi Kostadinov operated the drone.

Poet Nikolay Stoyanov composed the lyrics to *Bogdan Kalinka dumashe*, and singer Irina Kirmikchy composed the music. Both artists are from Horodnje.

What is Bulgaria to you?

Every morning, when I wake up, I say to myself: "Thank God I am in Bulgaria!". My life was divided into two chapters: living in Ukraine and living in Bulgaria. This is my home, where I feel most comfortable.

What are your future artistic projects?

I started the year with a number of solid projects. One of them was my song *Molitva za lyubov* (Prayer for love), which was released on February 14. It is very personal and intimate to me. It is also one of the most expensive projects I have ever completed. I work with some of the best arrangers in Bulgaria. One of them is Nikolay Toshev. I am very happy that I found an opportunity to realize one of my biggest dreams, which was to present the song and the video to it. I have a lot of hopes and I have one more dream - to release an album. This is almost done now. It will be comprised of 12 original songs.

Photos: Pavel Petlichki / personal archive

Mihaela Aroyo, photographer: Through my Photos I Portray the Everyday Life of Bessarabian Bulgarians

Svetlana Dragneva

Photographer Mihaela Aroyo has been taking pictures of Bessarabian Bulgarians since 2019, documenting their everyday life. At the end of August 2022, her exhibition titled *Root* was unveiled at the Central Railway Station in Varna.

Here is what Mihaela said about her interest in photography.

Mihaela, how did your interest in the subject of Bessarabian Bulgarians arise?

This happened quite spontaneously in 2019, when a colleague of mine and I travelled to the village of Stoianovca, Moldova. The annual youth festival *There Is Contact* was about to be held there. This is a forum for young Bessarabian Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova. As we wandered around the village, I stopped the car next to a lady to inquire about the fest's location. She said: "Speak Bulgarian". And then I realized where I was. This was my first contact with a Bessarabian Bulgarian. I knew very little about them, so that remark stuck with me.

Later that day, the young people who organized the festival welcomed us warmly. They had been waiting for us and worrying. It was then that I realized that just one night at the fest wouldn't suffice, that I wanted to document this community, so that more people in Bulgaria could get to know them better through my photos.

Which places in Bessarabia related to the Bulgarian community were you able to visit?

I have travelled seven or eight times to the region in Ukraine and Moldova. I have visited more than 30 settlements with Bulgarians. I reckon I have been to the most notable towns and villages: Bolhrad, Taraclia, Kubei, Horodnje, Krynychne, Tvardita, Corten, and others.



Every place is interesting. They welcomed us warmly everywhere. During these meetings I tried to capture the preserved customs and language, which are very important for Bessarabian Bulgarians to express their identity. I believe that my photos should portray the everyday life of Bulgarians, what they do and how they do it, what they feel. Landscape is also very important because it defines the way of life of these people.

What emotions did you experience, when you met this group of the Bulgarian people, who live outside Bulgaria?

At first, those emotions were unfamiliar to me. I was on the road, I had crossed several borders, and I was expecting to go to a foreign place. However, as I arrived in Bessarabia, I came to realize that I was feeling at home there. This is the main emotion I would single out.



I did not expect to see a church in your photo of Vynohradne. How did you end up there?

My colleague and I ended up there by chance. We were taking pictures in the neighbouring village of Orikhivka (editor's note: Aleksandar Malinov, one of Bulgaria's first prime ministers, was born there in 1867). There we met a TV crew from Odessa, who were shooting a film about Bessarabian Bulgarians. When they found out that we

were from Bulgaria and we were documenting the life of Bessarabian Bulgarians, they interviewed us. They suggested that we join them of their way to Vynohradne. That's how we ended up in the village in the evening. Lucky for me, I was able to capture this beautiful moment at dawn, the sun had just set, but there was still enough light to illuminate the whitewashed church. There were children riding motorbikes and having fun. This was a moment that could never happen a second time.



Photos: Svetlana Dragneva

Banitsa – the Queen of Bulgarian Tables

Maria Popova

The Bulgarian banitsa (milina) from the village of Zoria was inscribed on Ukraine's National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2022.

The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy added a total of 21 elements to the National ICH List that includes dishes, music and ritual practices from across the country. Odessa Oblast is presented with seven elements – klezmer music, the moshu Christmas ritual, the dry construction technology, fish soup, the placinda stuffed flatbread, the Museum of Traditional Folk Art, as well as the milina – the banitsa pastry from Zoria (Kamchik).

Zoria was founded in 1830 by Bulgarian settlers who had migrated from settlements along the river Kamchia in Bulgaria. Today it has over 5,500 residents, including more than 600 school-age children, 150 top athletes and 500 entrepreneurs.



The people of Zoria are very serious about preserving Bulgarian traditions and customs. The village has a large museum, three Bulgarian folk dance groups, a Bulgarian women's vocal group and a folk music orchestra.

A symbol of Bulgarian cuisine, banitsa is present at the table on all most important holidays. In Bessarabia (the southern part of Odessa Oblast inhabited by a compact Bulgarian community), the banitsa is also called milina and the recipes for making it have been handed down for generations for over two centuries.

In Ukraine, this "queen" of the table is prepared of thin layers of dough with various fillings. According to the way the layers are arranged, it could be round or layered, while according to taste it could be either sweet or salty. In spite of the huge variety of recipes, the most popular filling is made of eggs and cheese, topped with cream or yoghurt.

Banitsa is also a must at the New Year's feast, along with the other goodies on the table. The New Year banitsa is distinguished from the rest by that fortune signs for each member of the family are put in it by tradition. Health, the welfare of the family, money and love are the most widespread

wishes among Bulgarians in Bessarabia.

Bulgarians in Ukraine prepare this particular banitsa twice – to welcome the New Year according to both the Julian and the Gregorian calendar.

Besides being inscribed on Ukraine's National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the pastry has its own special day. On the initiative of the Odessa Bulgarian Association, Bulgarska Banitsa Day has been marked for the last 15 years at the All-Ukrainian Bulgarian Cultural Centre in Odessa to the attendance of quite a crowd. The event gathers the best Bulgarian masters of the art from Odessa who laughingly vie with each other which one will prepare the best. The number of participants grows by the year and women from the locations with Bulgarian population from the entire Odessa Oblast – Bolhrad, Izmail, Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy – take an active part in the festivities, adding Bulgarian horo chain dances and ruchenitsa to the endless variety of banitsas.



Photos: Facebook, personal archives

Bulgarian Traditional Ritual Peperuda in Kubei

Svetlana Dragneva

Alexander Polibza, who devoted himself to collecting and researching the traditions of Bessarabian Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova, and his collaborator – the photographer Valery Gaydardzhi – tell of the rain evoking ritual Peperuda (Butterfly) and the way it is observed in the Bulgarian-Gagauz village of Kubei.

"I can say that the tradition of Peperuda was the same in all Bulgarian villages in Bessarabia. There were only some local specificities. I tried to collect as much information as possible from the old people and to pass it on authentically," Polibza explained. The rite is performed by young girls and women.

"In Kubei, the Butterfly ritual is not tied to a specific date and is performed when needed. A group of girls gather and go around the houses on the street with a ritual song," he added.

Here is what he says of the specifics of Kubei's Peperuda:

"Each of the girls carries in her hands a small bowl of water



Photos: Valery Gaydardzhi



and green twigs with which they sprinkle the owners' yard, imitating raindrops. One of the girls carries a basket in which she collects gifts from the mistress of the house. It used to be flour and eggs but eggs were not used for that purpose in some villages as they were considered a symbol of hail. But times are changing and nowadays the gifts are mostly sweet things. Coins used to be thrown into the girls' purses, while now more money is given. The landlady throws a sieve around the yard and the way it falls determines whether it will rain soon. The girls use a clay figure, Germancho, which is central to the ritual. His eyes are made of blue beads or buttons. In Kubei it was also customary to dress him in children's clothes. Germancho would be covered with flowers like a dead man and symbolically buried in the field.

"The last stage of the ritual is the lamentation of Germancho, followed by a dinner, which by this time has already been prepared by someone's mother or grandmother, although sometimes it can be cooked by the girls that take part in the rite.

"The elders mention occasions when it was starting to drizzle as soon as the girls would come home back from the fields.

"According to two different versions, after 9 or 40 days the doll must be dug up and thrown into the river, which often also leads to rain," he concluded.

Bessarabian Village of Chiyshii Celebrates Midsummer in the Old Style



Photos: Maya Kostantinova

Svetlana Dragneva

The Bessarabian Bulgarian village of Chiyshii in the Bolhrad region celebrates Saint John's Eve in the old style, on July 7.

"We celebrate all religious Orthodox holidays and Bulgarian customs according to the old style (Julian calendar). Saint John's Eve is a big holiday for the girls. On this day, before sunset, the girls of the neighbourhood gather in groups and go outside the village to look for bedstraw. When they get home, the oldest woman allocates a sprig of bedstraw to each member of the family and puts them all under the eaves. On the morning of Midsummer's Day, they check the stalks and those that have not wilted are believed to bring health throughout the year to the named family members," said Anna Konstantinova, an ethnographer and guardian of Bulgarian traditions and customs from Bessarabia.

The Chiyshii girls also collect thistles. Konstantinova stressed that the girls must collect as many stalks of the flower from the herb as boys like them or vice versa. Once home, on Midsummer's Eve, the girl performs the ritual of planting the flowers, watering them and marking them. And whichever stalk of flowers has not wilted and sprouted in the morning, she will marry.

The other part of the tradition of the feast is related to the collection of herbs. Anna Konstantinova, together with her grandmother, started collecting herbs at a young age. She has been doing it ever since.

"Very early in the morning, before the sun rises, we pick



herbs. And only those women in the village who know the herbs go to collect them. We mainly grow gentian (cures goiter), milk thistle (for washing hair), field horsetail, St John's wort and common sage," she adds.

Chiyshii has a history of over 200 years and is one of the places with dense Bulgarian population. It is no coincidence that it is also known as "the singing Bulgarian village", as most of its inhabitants have exceptional voices and sing many Bulgarian folk songs.

Bulgarian Traditions Related to Engagements in the Village of Kubei

Svetlana Dragneva



Photos: Valery Gaydarzhi

Traditions related to the way Bulgarians got engaged in the past, are still observed in the village of Kubei in Bolhrad District.

"We decided to recreate the image of Bulgarian fiances from three Bessarabian villages with Bulgarian communities," Kubei ethnographer Alexandr Polibza told BTA.

The project, implemented in collaboration with photographer Valery Gaydarzhi, emphasizes on the clothing and jewellery that the fiances from the villages of

Chushmeliy, Sambater and Korten used in the past.

"Traditionally, girls who were engaged in the village of Korten wore an ornament in the form of a needle on their headscarf to highlight their new status.

"Those in the village of Sambater wore ornaments called "kyustek", fastened on both sides of their shawl.

"In the village of Chushmeliy they decorated their clothes with pafiti (metal belt buckles) and a white apron, which further emphasized that they were already betrothed."

Fekla the Quilt Maker

Anya Terzivets

Fekla Mincheva is a Bessarabian Bulgarian from the village of Kulevcha, Odessa Oblast. She grew up in a family in which all the women knew how to sew quilts and they taught her as well.

"When I was little, my aunts would come to my house and sew home textiles for my dowry. I would watch them make it and before my wedding I was able to sew a quilt myself. When I got married, I sewed things for my sisters-in-law's dowries together with my mother-in-law. That's how I learned to do it," she recalled.

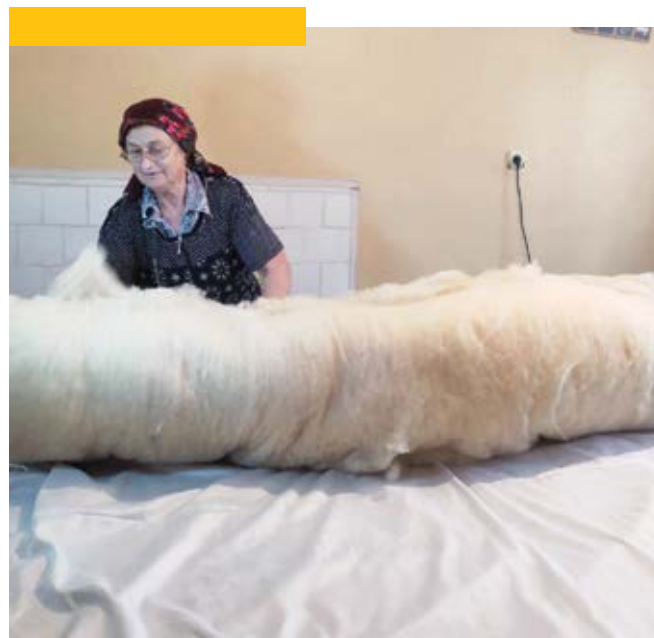
Over time, Fekla became known in the village as a good maker of woolen quilts at a young age and had to combine her cooking profession with her well-mastered craft as many friends and relatives began to order her quilts. She has already sewn quilts for her daughter, grandchildren, many neighbours and friends, and is currently sewing one for her great-grandson.

The process of creating the quilt consists of several stages. The hardest, according to Fekla, is washing the wool. "I wash a ton of wool during the summer months. You can't imagine how hard that is. And the rest of the months, I sew," the Bessarabian Bulgarian woman explained.

The next most difficult part is the sewing - with one needle, stitch after stitch and so on for hours. "Everything is handmade. Only the base for the quilt is made on a sewing machine. Then I put the wool in that warp, turn it over, sit on a chair and start sewing - seam by seam. I used to sew a lot, now I can't as much, but I am thankful for that. A quilt takes 11 hours to sew. People have to like it because it is used for 20 to 30 years and it has to be of high quality," she added.

Fekla recalled how her quilts once saved her guests from Kyiv who arrived unexpectedly in winter. She only had a cold room to put them up to sleep and she knew she and nothing to worry about as she had her hand-made wool quilts. At first the guests feared to undress in the cold but then did as she told them. They had a perfect night's sleep under the warm quilts and woke up happy the next day. They left after purchasing a quilt for themselves.

Fekla has not counted the quilts she has made and continues to make more even though she is now over 70 years old.



Mala Pereshchepina - The Place Where The Kubrat Treasure Was Found

Svetlana Dragneva

Mala Pereshchepina - the crossroads of millennia... Knowledge of the past and attitude towards it play a huge role in the formation of one's personality.



1. Pereshchepina Treasure

One of the greatest treasures in world history was discovered quite by accident in June 1912 in the coastal sands near the Vorskla River near the village of Mala Pereshchepina, southern Poltava Oblast in Ukraine. The treasure was discovered by a shepherd boy surnamed Derkach. According to one version, the neck of an eight-kilogram silver vase was slightly visible in the sand undermined by the river.

Rumors of the treasure quickly spread. After finding out, the local bailiff went there with the gendarmerie and dug up many more interesting things... It was he who took measures to save the find and reported it to the governor, and he reported to the archaeologists in the Russian capital St. Petersburg. The treasure was extraordinary: 800 individual items, mostly gold (weighing almost 25 kg in total) and silver (about 50 kg). These are the numerous gold and silver vessels, ornaments, gold Byzantine coins - solidi dated from

the middle of the 7th century, gold bracelets, rings, weapon fragments, gold details, parts of a wooden staff with gold lining. By comparing the jewels found in the village of Mala Pereshchepina with those found in several burials on the steppes, the scholars concluded that these were treasures from the burial of a prominent member of the Old Bulgarian aristocracy. The discovered ring with the monogram "Kubrat Patrikios" is one of the objects, which has led scholars to believe that the Pereschepina treasure was located in the grave of the Khan of Great Bulgaria.

The inscriptions on the objects from the treasure, read by the German scholar Joachim Werner, and more recently by scholars in Bulgaria and in the State Hermitage in St. Petersburg prove that this is a burial site and the treasure found in it belongs to Khan Kubrat.

In 1984, the German scientist Joachim Werner was the first to identify the Pereshchepina treasure as the burial of the seventh-century ruler of Great Bulgaria. Werner justified his assumption of the tremendous wealth of the discovered



treasure, which in the 7th century could have belonged only to a ruler of the highest rank. The status of the person buried in the area of the village is also evidenced by the regalia, which in the 7th century were only received by Byzantine rulers as gifts for the most powerful leaders of the steppe peoples - potential allies. These regalia include a golden buckle, bracelets, a ring-hilted sword with a golden lining, a silver platter with a cross on which, presumably, there were golden Byzantine solidi minted during the reign of Heraclius and his sons in 637-638, and also the aforementioned gold ring with a monogram reading "ΧΟΒΡΑΤΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΙΚΙΟΥ". The message of Patriarch Nikephoros, dated 634 - 640, speaks of a peace alliance between Emperor Heraclius and Kubrat, during which the Khan received the patrician rank and rich gifts. A considerable part of his treasure was given to him at the conclusion of this very alliance. The treasure of Pereshchepina was buried in a pit 1.42 m in diameter and 1.06 m deep. Apart from the jewels, archaeologists have pulled out of the pit pieces of rotten oak beams, silk cloth embroidered with gold thread, square gold plates with holes, etc. All of these objects could be the remains of a funerary litter and sarcophagus; the location of the treasure in the low riparian area at a shallow depth may indicate that it was

a burial in a river bed ("bottom burial"). No remains of this burial have survived, so it may have been a cenotaph (empty burial), a corpse burning outside, or most likely the burial pit with treasure was located somewhere near a final and irretrievably undermined grave.

2. 2001 - the first large-scale pilgrimage to the site of the golden treasure of the grave of Kubrat in Mala Pereshchepina, Novosanzharsky district, Poltava region

In 2001, on the initiative of a group led by Nikolay Gaber (Ukrainian MP), Mihail Chenkov, Ivan Vlaev, Anton Gerzhikov, Vesela Zalogina, Dora Kostova and others, a gathering of Bulgarians in Ukraine was organized to raise awareness for the necessity of commemorating Khan Kubrat. The initiative of the Bulgarians in Ukraine was supported by the regional authorities. A charity fund was established and a project of the "Khan Kubrat Memorial" historical-cultural complex was developed. On the site of the found treasure, i.e. the grave of Khan Kubrat in the village of Mala Pereshchepina, Poltava region, a monument was erected during the gathering in August 2001. Kubrat's motto ("In unity is strength") is inscribed on it. The Fund's project envisages the construction of a museum of Khan Kubrat, an Orthodox church and monastery, a memorial mosque, a restaurant with various cuisines, and a hotel.

Since 2001 various events, meetings and conferences have been organized at this location. The pilgrimage has acquired an international character, in which representatives of Bulgarian societies and organizations in Ukraine participate, as well as Bulgarians from all over the world - Bulgaria, Russia, Germany, Romania, Moldova, Czechia, etc. A large number of artists from Ukraine and Bulgaria take part in the festivals and concerts, as well as famous artists.

3. 2012 - 100 years since the discovery of the golden treasure and the grave of Khan Kubrat

The idea of creating an initiative committee for the celebration of the 100th anniversary was of the Association of Bulgarians around the world and the President of the "Khan Kubrat" International Charity Fund Rumen Spasov. In February 2012, with the joint efforts of various organizations, an International Initiative Committee was established to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the archaeological discovery of Khan Kubrat's grave. Since 2001, Nikolay Gaber, supporters and representatives of the local Ukrainian authorities have established this site as a memorial and as a significant historical site. As a tribute and a sign of respect for his patriotic efforts, he was elected Coordinator of the Initiative Committee.

In February 2012, on the initiative of Rumen Spasov, the then Secretary General of the World Parliament of Bulgarians to the ABC Ivan Momchev, with the help of the Vice President of the ABC Yuri Gramatik, and the active assistance of the then Ambassador of Bulgaria to Ukraine Dimitar Vladimirov, an International Initiative Committee was established at the

Bulgarian Embassy in Kyiv. Its main task was to create and coordinate an organization to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the burial mound and treasure of the restorer of the Old Great Bulgaria near present-day Mala Pereshchepina, as well as to organize the construction of a monumental memorial complex at the site itself.

In September 2012, the festival "Towards the Legacy - Kubrat 100" was held on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of Khan Kubrat's grave. It was attended by more than 3,600 people, including many Bulgarians living in Ukraine, Bulgaria, Russia, Moldova, Tatarstan, Chuvashia, Crimea, Romania, France, Italy, Spain, as well as locals. On the part of the kind and extremely friendly and hospitable hosts, the regional, city and municipal leaderships of Poltava, Novi Sanzhary, Mala Pereshchepina participated. Official Bulgarian representatives also took part in the historical event.

The construction of the Khan Kubrat Memorial Complex was launched, and the memorial plaque, erected in 2001, was moved to a specially constructed site. From the beginning of the forest to the memorial plaque on the sand dunes, a 200-meter reinforced concrete path was made.

4. Museum of Ukrainian-Bulgarian Friendship at the Mala Pereshchepina school

Every year teachers and students welcome guests and Bulgarian delegations to their village. The local Ukrainians treat the fact of Kubrat's found treasure and Bulgarian history in general with great attention and utmost regard. They are also proud of the fact that the treasure is considered one of

the most valuable medieval ones in Europe.

In September 2011, a Museum of Ukrainian-Bulgarian Friendship was opened at the school with the help of history teacher Anatoly Bereza. Photos of the landmark items and exhibits of the found treasure are displayed: the ring, sword, sets, jugs and other objects. The portrait of Kubrat (by artist Elizaveta Myagkova), presented to the school by Genadi Koev - doyen of the Bulgarians in Ukraine and vice-president of the Odessa Bulgarian Society, is also on display in the museum.

The hosts begin the museum tour with information about the first gathering in August 2001 on local land, which became a tradition. Collected materials about all festivals, visits, meetings and conferences throughout the years are shown as well. This is a kind of contemporary reading of Ukrainian-Bulgarian friendship. The stones of the ancient Bulgarian capitals of Pliska, Okhrid, Tarnovo, and Veliki Preslav occupy a central place in the exhibition. They were a gift from Bulgaria during the first gathering in 2001.

"The paths of friendship of the two brotherly nations - the Ukrainian and the Bulgarian" is the next exposition. A valuable library dedicated to Bulgaria, as well as Ukrainian and Bulgarian authors is presented. Among them are the books of the Poltava historian and culture researcher of Ukraine Vera Zhuk.

The museum also displays a flag donated by the Bulgarian teacher Elizaveta Georgieva, who had it specially made for the museum in Mala Pereshchepina. There is another gift from Bulgaria - a Bulgarian folk costume.

In 2018, the village of Mala Pereshchepina was visited by a delegation from the ancient capital of Bulgaria - the city of Pliska. A twinning agreement was signed between the town of Pliska and Mala Pereshchepina.



Photo: Mala Pereshchepina general school, Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, archive

Bulgarian Monuments in Ukraine

Svetlana Dragneva



The Bulgarian community in Ukraine preserves its historical memory by erecting bas-reliefs, monuments and busts of notable personalities in Bulgarian history. Bulgarian communities and organizations have been doing that especially in post-1991 independent Ukraine. Non-governmental associations, supported both by Bulgaria and by the central and regional Ukrainian authorities, built monuments in Bessarabia, Tavria, Kyiv, Olshanka, etc.

1. THE BULGARIAN VOLUNTEERS MEMORIAL IN BOLHRAD

Bolhrad has three pillars that support the Bulgarian spirit in Bessarabia and are a testimony to the 200 years of Bulgarian presence there. The spiritual pillar is the Bolhrad Cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration, built with the donations of the Bulgarian settlers in 1838. The educational pillar is the Bolhrad High School of G. S. Rakovski, opened in 1858 with the efforts of local Bulgarian dignitaries. The third - the historical pillar - was placed at the beginning of the 21st century, on October 20, 2012 - the Memorial of the Bulgarian Volunteers. It was built with support from the President of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, Anton Kisse, and many compatriots and supporters. It was designed by the Odessa architect of Bulgarian origin Nikolay Bazan. The monument is a four-plaque obelisk with the names of some 250 Bulgarian volunteers from Bessarabia written on it.

The participation of the Bessarabian Bulgarians in the volunteer detachments during the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-1878 was a result of the preserved Bulgarian national identity. A total of 7,444 people enrolled in the Bulgarian volunteer detachments, including nearly 1,000 Bessarabian Bulgarians. Of those, 235 were officially identified. Among them were notable figures such as Danail Nikolaev, Stefan Lyubomski, Stefan Kisov and Avraam Gudzhev.

2. HRISTO BOTEV MONUMENTS AND MEMORIAL PLAQUES IN UKRAINE

The name of the Bulgarian poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev is permanently connected with Odessa, Izmail, Bolhrad and Zadunayevka. He arrived in Odessa on November 14, 1863, where he studied at the Second Odessa High School and wrote his first poem there. Botev was a student for one year at the Faculty of History and Philology at Odessa University. Towards the end of 1866, he left the city and was appointed a teacher in the Bulgarian village of Zadunayevka, Bessarabia. In 1869-70 he lived and taught in Izmail, and often visited Bolhrad.

The memory of Hristo Botev in modern Ukraine is still alive today. Six monuments have been built in places connected with Botev and the Bulgarian community there: Odessa, Izmail, Artsyz, Zadunayevka (Odessa District), Olshanka (Kirovograd Region) and Botyev (Zaporizhzhya Region). Two memorial plaques were placed in Izmail and Odessa.

Every year on January 6 and June 2, Bulgarian communities and organizations pay tribute to the hero and organize observances and various other events.

ODESSA

- A memorial bas-relief of Hristo Botev, located at 93 Novoselsky Street, was built in the 1980s on the building of the former Second Men's High School, where he studied in 1863-65.



- A bust-monument to Botev was built on November 13, 2009 in Prokhorovskaya Square. The bust was donated by representatives of the Bulgarian community and was a result of the initiative of the Odessa District Council and the Congress of Bulgarians in Ukraine.

IZMAIL

- The monument of Hristo Botev in the town of Izmail is located in the courtyard of the main campus of the Izmail State Humanitarian University. It was built on March 20, 1978 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule. The bust was made by Izmail sculptor Mihail Nedopak.

- A Hristo Botev memorial plaque on the building of the Izmail Polytechnical Lyceum was restored and unveiled on September 5, 2020 on the occasion of the 135th anniversary of the Unification of Bulgaria. In the 19th century, this site was the location of the state church school where Botev taught Bulgarian in 1869-70. The first plaque at this place was placed in 1980 by Mihail Nedopak and broke up over time. It has been restored according to the sketches of the previous sculptor with the joint efforts of the four local organizations: the St. Sofia Izmail Municipality, the St. Sofia Society, the St. Cyril and Methodius Society, the Hristo Botev Society and the Rodnini Association of Bulgarian Families in Bessarabia.

ZADUNAYEVKA

- Built in 1991, the monument to Hristo Botev is located in the central park of the village and is the work of Bulgarian sculptor Georgi Nedyalkov.

ARTSYZ

- On June 5, 2010, a monument to Hristo Botev was put up in the central alley of the town of Artsyz, Odessa District. The initiative and organization was of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine and the Artsyz Regional Bulgarian Society "Hristo Botev".

OLSHANKA

- On June 2, 2010, the Day of Remembrance of the Death of Hristo Botev and All Those Who Died for the Freedom of Bulgaria, a bust-monument to the revolutionary was erected in Olshanka, Kirovograd region. It is located in the central part of the district center by the decision of the Olshanka town hall and is personally donated by the President of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine and Ukrainian MP Anton Kisse for the local Bulgarian community. With the assistance and organization of the chairman of the Olshanka Regional Bulgarian Society "Alfatar" Anatoly Nesterov, the construction works for the erection of the monument were carried out.

In the Olshanka region are located the Bulgarian villages of Dobroe and Stankuvat, where the descendants of the first Bulgarian settlers, who migrated in 1774, live.

BOTIEVO:

- On June 24, 2011, a bust-monument to Hristo Botev was erected in the Bulgarian village of Botievo, Priazovsky district, Zaporizhzhia region. The initiative and the organization were made by the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine and Zaporizhzhia Regional Bulgarian Society.

The Bulgarian community moved to Tavria from Bessarabia in 1862, founding Bulgarian villages in Primorsky, Berdyansky, Priazovsky and Melitopolsky districts. Until 1927 the village was called Tsarevorovka, but in the same year it was renamed in honor of the Bulgarian poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev. During this period the village was included in the Botev Bulgarian National District, which existed until 1938.



3. VASIL LEVSKI MONUMENT IN BERDYANSK

A monument to Vasil Levski was built in Berdyansk in 2007 on the initiative of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine and the Patriotism Bulgarian Association in Berdyansk. It was donated to the local Bulgarian community by the Vasil Levski Foundation and was cast by the Sofia-based company Vivaruzh. The pedestal of polished black granite was donated by Sergey Zhelev, a Bulgarian from Tavria.



4. MONUMENTS TO ST. ST. CYRIL AND METHODIUS

In Ukraine there are a number of monuments to the two Saints Cyril and Methodius, around which celebrations are organized every year.

The composition of the monument in Kyiv consists of the figures of Princess Olga, Andrew the Apostle and St. St. Cyril and Methodius. The first monument in Kyiv was built in 1911 by Ivan Kavaleridze and Pyotr Snitkin. In 1923, the sculptural composition was dismantled to be rebuilt and unveiled May 25, 1996. The restoration was done by sculptors Vitaly Sivko, Nikolai Bilik and Vitaly Shishov.

The second monument to Cyril and Methodius in Kyiv is located in the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and was erected on October 29, 2008 as an exact copy of the one in the town of Mukachevo.

The monument to St. St. Cyril and Methodius in Mukachevo, Transcarpathian Region, was built in 1996 and consecrated in 2000 by Metropolitan Vladimir. It was made by the local sculptor Ivan Brody and architect Alexander Andialosi.

Nearly 20 years ago, on the initiative of the 681 Bulgarian Cultural and Educational Society of Ilyichov, a monument to St. St. Cyril and Methodius was put up in the yard of the General School No. 4 in the town of Ilyichovsk, Odessa District.

Due to the efforts of the Odessa Bulgarian Society and the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, the Mayor's office of the city officially approved the placement of the monument in front of the Humanities Corps of the Odessa National University "I. I. Mechnikov".

On June 3, 2017, a monument to the Holy Brothers was unveiled in the Bessarabian Bulgarian village of Kulevcha, founded by Bulgarian settlers in 1830.

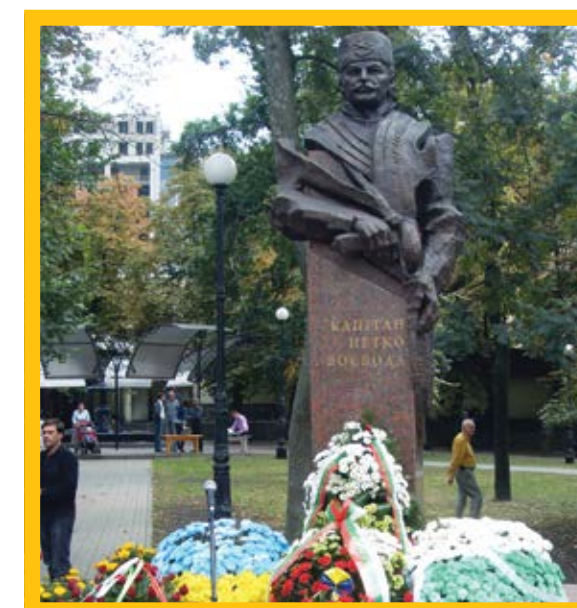


5. MONUMENT OF GEORGI RAKOVSKI IN BOLHRAD

The Bolhrad High School was restored in 1993 and since April 5, 1999 by Decree of the Council of Ministers of Ukraine it has been named "Georgi Sava Rakovsky". The school was among the initiators of the erection of a monument to its patron. In 1999, a bust-monument to Rakovsky, created by Bulgarian sculptor Ivan Lazarov, was erected in front of the main entrance of the school.

6. MONUMENT OF CAPTAIN PETKO VOYVODA IN KYIV

On September 8, 2011 in the Ukrainian capital a bust-monument to one of the most outstanding personalities in the history of Bulgarian national liberation movement - Captain Petko Voyvoda, was erected. The occasion was his 165th birth anniversary. This is the 33rd monument to Petko Kiryakov in the Ukrainian capital. The monument was built due to the joint efforts of the Union of Thracian Societies in Bulgaria and the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine with the support of the Kyiv City State Administration. Its author is the famous Bulgarian sculptor Prof. Valentin Starchev.



7. HADZHI DIMITAR MONUMENT IN MELITOPOL

On September 11, 2020 a bust-monument to the voivoda Hadzhi Dimitar was put up in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhya Region,.



It is located in the Sliven town square. The initiative is of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, the Bulgarian Societies in Zaporizhzhya Region, supported by the Melitopol Town Hall.

Photo: Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, archive

Bulgarian Painters in Ukraine - the Culture Trove of the Bulgarian People

Svetlana Dragneva



Fine, graphic and decorative artists are an integral part of the contemporary Bulgarian cultural and enlightenment process in Ukraine.

Rich in imagery and unique in subject matter, the pictorial heritage of Bulgarian painters in Ukraine is enduring and is inseparable from the cultural and educational revival process of the Bessarabian, Tavian and Crimean Bulgarians. The work of Bulgarian painters is a cherished spiritual asset. Bulgarian in spirit, their work is part of the general process of the development of art in Bulgaria. Bulgarian painters living in Ukraine have two homelands: Bulgaria is their ancestral homeland and Ukraine is where they were born and where they live and create. Their works reflect in a unique way the everyday life of Bulgarians in

Ukraine with its mysterious and authentic customs, with its joys and pains, with its submission and firmness in the face of the trials of fate, with its piety and faith in providence.

Holding art exhibitions is a priority in the activity of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine and they have been actively involved in their organization from 1994 until the present day.

From 1994 to 2015, eight exhibitions were organized in Odessa and Kyiv under the auspices of the Association, the Odessa Bulgarian Society and the Kyiv Bulgarian Society. The initiator, organizer and creative executive of all Bulgarian art exhibitions is Hennadiy Koev - Vice President of the Odessa Bulgarian Society.

The first exhibition of art works created by Ukrainian Bulgarians was organized on the occasion of the 116th anniversary of the Liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule and was held in February-March 1994 at the Odessa Museum of Western and Eastern Art. At that time 110 works by 22 artists were presented.

The second exhibition with 156 works - the creative result of 37 artists - was already held the following year (in March of 1995) as part of the celebration of the Day of Bulgarian Alphabet, Bulgarian Enlightenment and Culture in the Ukrainian House in Kyiv.

The third and fourth exhibitions were again displayed at the Odessa Museum of Western and Eastern Art and were dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War (May 1995) and to the Day of Bulgarian Alphabet, Bulgarian Enlightenment and Culture, which coincided with the Days of Bulgaria in Ukraine (May 1997).

The fifth exhibition entitled "At the Beginning of the Century" was dedicated to the new 21st century and was held at the Odessa Museum of Western and Eastern Art as part of the celebration of the Day of Bulgarian Alphabet, Bulgarian Enlightenment and Culture (May 2000). The fifth exhibition entitled "At the Beginning of the Century" was dedicated to the new 21st century and was held at the Odessa Museum of Western and Eastern Art as part of the celebration of the Day of Bulgarian Alphabet, Bulgarian Enlightenment and Culture (May 2000).

The sixth exhibition of the Bulgarian artists was opened on July 10, 2005 in the centre of the spiritual treasury of

Ukraine - the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, in a solemn atmosphere and with the participation of the at that time Bulgarian Vice President Angel Marin, representatives of the political and cultural elite of Kyiv, Bulgarian public figures and businessmen. Some 102 works by about 30 Bulgarian painters were exhibited.

On the eve of 2006, another exhibition of Bulgarian painters was held at the All-Ukrainian Centre for Bulgarian Culture in Odessa - a children's and youth exhibition, in which the pupils of the Zadunaev Art School in the Artsyz District and their teacher Ivan Nenov took part.

The seventh and eighth exhibitions of Bulgarian artists were opened at the All-Ukrainian Centre for Bulgarian Culture in Odessa in May 2008 and October 2015.

In the paintings of the artists, many of whom have exhibited their works at international exhibitions in Bulgaria, Japan, USA, and Germany, the ancient tradition of their predecessors and the beauty of their native land come to life. Each of them has his own unique style of self-expression. The artists are: Ivan Shishman, Aleksandr Kara, Pavel Balamadzhi, Pavel Kolokolov, Ilya Zlatov, Tetyana Dimanova-Golinska, Larisa Puhanova, Arsen Rustamov, Anna Konstantinova, Vera Romanovska, Lyudmila Romashko, Petr Chakir, Sergei Grigorash, Ivan Pastir, Pavlo Macedonsky, Ivan Roglev, Vladislav Fuklev, Galina Sapunzi, Elizaveta Myagkova-Deli, Larisa Chakir-Uzun, Anatoly Trufkin, Vasil Boev, Stefan Domusci, Mikhail Peykov, Ivan Nenov, Ivan Pirkov, Igor Stoyanov, Ivan Stoyanov, among others.



Yona Tukuser Recreates in Paintings Holodomor's Tragedy for Bessarabian Bulgarians

Svetlana Dragneva

Yona Tukuser is a Bessarabian Bulgarian. She was born in the Bulgarian-populated village of Glavan in Ukraine, from where, she "draws energy, strength and themes for her art", to use her own words. Between 2003 and 2007 she studied at the IZMAIL State University of Humanities in Ukraine, graduating in Fine Arts, in the class of Ivan Shishman. Then, in the 2007-2010 period, she studied painting at the National Academy of Arts in Sofia.

Since 2009, Yona has been researching historical materials about the famine in Ukraine and the Soviet Union from the period 1921-1923, 1932-1933, 1946-1947, using an academic approach to selecting sources of information from archives and personal interviews with survivors. The results of the research on the subject serve to recreate the Soviet famine in Ukraine through the means of painting.

Her first exhibition, "Hunger", was presented in March 2011 in Sofia.

The exhibition was organized with the support of the Embassy of Ukraine from September 27 to November 27, 2023, at the National Gallery in Sofia. It was dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine and the 75th anniversary of the 1946-1947 famine in which the most Bulgarians died in Bessarabia.

"In this project, Yona Tukuser, who works in the metamodernism style, interprets in her paintings the tragic consequences of the famine in the 20th century and glances with concern towards the present day in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine," Martina Yordanova, the exhibition's curator, wrote about her.

The National Gallery in Sofia closed the exhibition by Yona Tukuser on 27 November - the day on which the memory of those who perished in the Holodomor was



commemorated in Ukraine. On the same day, the Sofia City Art Gallery bought a canvas from the exhibition, which, according to the artist, is the reason why she started this project.

Another work of hers, "Bessarabia", was donated by Yona to the National Gallery. An inscription on the painting reads that "there are two large Bulgarian communities on the territory of Ukraine - in Bessarabia and Tavria. During the two Famines of 1921-1923 and 1932-1933, 30,000 people died among the Bulgarians in Tavria. Until the beginning of World War II, the Bulgarians in Bessarabia were within the borders of Romania. In the winter of 1946-1947, the Stalinist regime organized a Holodomor in Bessarabia as well, in which over 70,000 ethnic Bulgarians died. In total, about 100,000 Bessarabian and Tavrian Bulgarians died in the three Stalinist Holodomors, which was one third of their number."

Yona, as an artist, you introduced your big project "Hunger" to the viewers. What are the stages of its preparation and its implementation?

I have been developing the Hunger project for 13 years. Even as a student at the National Academy of Art in Sofia, I was already thinking about the subject of hunger in Ukraine. I started reading archival documents about the famine - about the post-war famine in 1946-1947, the Famine in 1932-1933 and the first famine in 1921-1922 in the Volga region. I researched these materials back in 2009 and when I graduated in 2010, I immediately started making the first sketches. And at the beginning of 2011 I showed the first exhibition "Hunger" in Sofia. My focus was on the Bessarabian Bulgarians - the famine after the Second World War in 1946-1947. I went to live in New York in 2012 and returned to Sofia two years later, as I was invited to present the "Hunger" exhibition at the UN headquarters in New York.

I returned to Bulgaria to continue painting on the subject and to research new archival sources. Prior to that, I used research articles, ready information by historians from their point of view. But since 2013, I have begun to search for unpublished sources and archival documents. I looked for stories interesting to me, as an artist. Because scholarly publications present statistical information that lacks emotion. That information was insufficient for me. I was looking for the details of the tragedy of a person, of a family, and such stories are not published in books and publications. I worked for a long time with archives in Sofia, Dobrich, Bucharest, Izmail and Odessa. I researched these stories for a while, until 2018. And then I started doing video interviews.

Prompted by missing information in official prosecution documents confirming the presence of cannibalism in Bessarabia (Ukraine) in the period 1946-1947, I undertook research through an alternative source of historical information - oral history. I conducted interviews in front of a video camera with 86 people from twelve Bulgarian settlements in Ukraine. Turning to the living collective memory of local residents, I recorded the shared memories of the existence of cannibalism in their villages.

They told me on camera how collective farms came about after the war. About the Soviet government's policy to tax meat, wool, eggs, milk and other foods. One old woman told me that she couldn't get married until she paid a tax of 300 kg of meat. She had to get permission from the town hall to get married. And she was a young girl. Apart from the tax in the form of food, there were also squads of Komsomol members from the town hall going around houses to seize food from the population and force them to join the collective farm because nobody wanted to do so on their own free will. Those who disobeyed starved to death.

As far as the Bessarabian Bulgarians are concerned, over 100 thousand of them died during the famine. This is data from research. I have also done statistics, I have spoken to many village mayors, in some villages 50-70 percent of the population perished. The Bulgarians themselves said that



the famine was not such a great tragedy in all villages. A lot depended on the village leaders, who protected their fellow villagers, tried to help them, warned them that grain would be seized, etc.

For example, in the villages of Bolhrad district - Orikhivka [also known as Pandakli] and Vinogradne [Sambatar] it was terrible. When I talked to elderly people in Sambatar, I heard such terrible things, that even I as an artist, could not come up with such paintings. To accompany the exhibition "Hunger" I made the documentary "ANTHROPOPHAG" with the interviews of the elderly people of Bessarabia, which can also be seen on YouTube.

During the interviews one grandmother said to me "It was so scary, I wish you never experience it and never even hear about this horror". Little is known about this because those people who went through these horrors did not wish to talk about it. The psychological trauma was so strong with them that they tried to forget about the famine. And that's why it's not common to talk about it, because the people themselves want it to be forgotten and the next generations don't know about this tragedy.

What is the main appeal that you, as an artist, make to the viewer?

My message is that tragedy should unite us, not serve as an enmity between people. For the Hunger project I included two paintings made at the beginning of the war in Ukraine. They are the central part of the exhibition. I painted the paintings after February 24 in Sofia at the Nu Boyana Film Studios, where the CEO, Yariv Lerner, gave me the opportunity to continue painting on the Hunger project exhibition for free. Last summer I returned to my home village of Glavan to finish this project. I turned the large barn at home into a studio and prepared 80 large canvases to make paintings based on the subjects of the collected stories from the video interviews. After the war started my creative process was interrupted and I returned to Sofia in

early March. Then Lerner gave me a studio and helped me bring the canvases to Sofia.

These two central paintings deal with the famine of 1946-1947 in Bessarabia and the current war in Ukraine. One of the paintings is from the past, it's 4 meters big. It is a story about a boy from my village of Glavan, which happened in 1946. This Bulgarian boy's parents died of starvation. The other one is about the current war in Ukraine, in the town of Mariupol. The story is about a boy named Iliya, who is six years old. I heard his story in the Ukrainian media. His parents died in the war and he spent three weeks in a bomb shelter. He said he was so hungry that he started eating his friend's toy. I created this canvas based on this vivid story that repeats itself. This is the story of the Bulgarian child from the famine 75 years ago and the Ukrainian child from Mariupol now. With these two paintings I want to show how tragedy unites us.

This topic is very substantial and heavy. Where does your interest in it come from?

I have a memory of when, as a student in the 5th grade, our history teacher showed us a picture of the famine in the USSR and Ukraine. He showed us a picture of cannibals from the Volga region from 1921-1922. I was so shocked that it was imprinted in my mind for life. He gave us homework to ask our grandparents about how they survived the famine of 1946-1947 and write their story for homework. All of us in the class then heard about the famine for the first time. The shock I experienced as a child from that photo provoked me to revisit this topic as a student. I told my colleagues from the art academy about the famine and it turned out that they did not know about the history of the Bessarabian Bulgarians, that they had experienced the tragedy of mass starvation. This prompted me to recreate history in paintings to show what our ancestors went through.



Photo: Yona Tukuser, own photo

What other themes are present in your work?

In parallel, I am working on several other new projects. This is a series of paintings related to my birthplace in Bessarabia. One project is called "Root", the other "Time". But they are all connected with the land where I was born. It's a Bulgarian theme. I present the life and lifestyle of the Bulgarian in Bessarabia. In the "Time" project, each picture corresponds to one second, a still from video footage shot in the period from 1994 to 2012 in my native house. Through the prism of my family, I am preparing a series of 130 paintings that I started in 2015. In them, I present my family from video footage about the everyday life of a Bulgarian in a village in Bessarabia - the field, the land, making cheese. Each picture is a frame from the video. It is one second of my life. 130 pictures. 130 frames. 130 seconds of my life. This project is scientific and artistic. I consult with specialists, physicists. It's a philosophical look on a quantum level. The painting for me is not an end in itself to illustrate the life of a Bulgarian in a village in Bessarabia, I use it as a model to "illustrate" through the medium of painting my concept of an artist's idea of time. The project "Time" is not finished yet, 70 paintings are already finished, while the others are started but not finished.

Ancestral memory plays a great role in the future of man. What is Bulgaria for you and why did you choose to make a career here?

For me Bulgaria is my homeland, even though I was born in Bessarabia, Ukraine. The feeling of homeland is Bulgaria. This is on a subconscious level. Realizing that Bulgaria is the cradle of an ancient civilization gives me strength and self-confidence as a contemporary artist, turning to history and art. I am inspired by the past. For me it is on a subconscious level, I don't flaunt the Bulgarian, but rather feel admiration.

Bulgarian in Ukraine Paints Landscapes on Missile, Shell Fragments

Anya Terzivetz



Native of the Zaporizhzhia Region, artist Vadim Mitkov was born in a Bulgaro-Ukrainian family. He has been into fine arts and drawing ever since he was a child, but he did not like to have rules imposed on him by teachers. Thus, at his very first lesson as a schoolboy, he escaped from the art studio where his father enrolled him in order to improve his drawing technique. From that moment on, Vadim remained alone with his talent and through observation and his own feelings he developed as an artist in his own right. In time, he received a technical education and today is the director of a printing company. Nevertheless, he remains true to his artistic passion, which he has honed to a professional level - hence his regular participation in national and regional art exhibitions.

The new reality in Ukraine is changing the lives of its citizens. People change their residence, their job, their way of life and values. The artists' work makes no exception. Half a year ago Vadim received an offer to paint on fragments of missiles and shells, to sell these works, and to use the funds to help Ukrainian war effort.

"I accepted the offer. At the beginning it was very difficult for me because, touching the shapeless fragments, I felt a lot of pain and sadness: some of them must have brought death and destruction to our land. And I wanted to turn the bad energy, which was absorbed in the deformed metal, into something that brings joy," Mitkov said.

His first works reflect warfare and are emotionally intense. They sparked great interest in the local community and were bought at a charity auction organized by volunteers supporting Ukrainian soldiers. However, over time the metal debris became covered with romantic landscapes, portraits and symbolic images. The artist explains that he preferred to create peaceful images and transform evil into positive energy in the name of victory.

The first 50 works were made in no time at all. The artist saw their creation as a short-term project aimed to make him useful for his country. Then he paused. Today, he is revisiting the project with a new energy and putting in it new ideas: to keep a trace of the war and transform evil into light. "Many people in the world cannot comprehend what war is, they imagine it as no more than the frames in an art film, but it is very real and it can storm anyone's life", he said. "I have watched people touching the deadly metal on which my paintings are created, and rethink some things."

Nowadays the artist is preparing for his first exhibition of works created on missile and shell fragments.

He continues to create new painted fragments of weapons and sends his works to charity auctions and various museums across Ukraine and abroad so that people can see that Ukrainians want to turn war into art.



To Paint the Life of Bulgarians on... Gourds

Anya Terzivets



Ilya Zlatov is an ethnic Bulgarian painter from the village of Kulevcha, Odessa District. Besides painting on canvases, he creates scenes on gourds of the Lagenaria variety. Interestingly, being a graduate of the Odessa Traditional Educational Institution, where future art teachers acquire and refine their artistic skills, he became not only the discoverer of a new art medium but also introduced the gourds to the Budzhak Steppe (south of Ukraine and Moldova). His wife Elizaveta helped him in that endeavour. Back in 2002, she brought unknown seeds from Italy. "Pumpkins" of an unusual shape grew there, with long "noses". Then the artist began to dry the gourds and paint on them scenes from the lives of Bulgarians. Thus, in 2003, the first works on Zlatov's decorative gourds began to appear. Some of them were adapted to be used as household utensils. In some of them the Zlatov family kept salt, in others - paprika.

As time went on, Zlatov devoted more and more room to growing pumpkins in his garden, and the artist's neighbours and fellow villagers increasingly recognized themselves in the funny and sad stories that forever stand still on the plump shapes of the pumpkins.

Nowadays the collection of the artist includes 200 works. Some are held in the collections of celebrities and art connoisseurs around the world. "Kratunkite", as Bulgarians in Ukraine call them using the Bulgarian word for "gourd", have become essential and permanent exhibits at ethnic festivals and festive local and larger gatherings. The themes of the drawings are also related to the everyday life of the Bulgarians, their customs and traditions. But recently a new mood, inspired by the times, has appeared in Zlatov's works.

"This is one of the last works dedicated to the Cossacks, our valiant warriors. They are depicted on horseback. And underneath is the snake they defeated. Lately I have been creating drawings that show my attitude to war," the artist says.

Ilya Zlatov plans to send some of his latest works to the front line so that soldiers can see that artists are trying to support them too.

The artist from Kulevcha devotes a lot of time to his students. He finds Ivan to be among the most talented. In his finished work one can see Ukrainians and Bulgarians picking grapes. "I want my 'cartoons' to reflect what is positive in the world. I want there to be no war and no violence," says Zlatov's student and says he will continue to improve in this direction of decorative art.

Ilya dreams of opening, after the end of the war, a gourd museum.



Motherly Care for the Soldiers

Anya Terzivets



Women from the village of Vynohradivka, Tarutyne Region in Ukraine, knit winter socks for soldiers at the front. One of the local women who came up with the idea is Olga Ilyinichna Kichizhi, who got 10 of her friends to knit along.

"I fire up the woodstove, invite the neighbours over and we knit socks. We do our best to keep the soldiers warm in the trenches in winter. Many people have joined in this activity. We knit in such a way that the socks are comfortable, one pair should not weigh more than 100 grams. I weigh the balls of yarn and give everybody just enough for one or two pairs. I set the speed of knitting: faster, faster," says Olga.

"The cold has already set in and the soldiers need to warm up. In the future, we will continue to knit and send out, even in small batches. Even if we manage to keep a few people warm, it is good. Today, in order to spend less electricity in these disastrous times, we are in this room during the day, while there is still natural light," the woman adds.

More than 50 pairs of warm socks have already managed to reach the troops at the front. The women of Vynohradivka say they would like women from other villages to become supportive of their idea, to join them in knitting winter socks.

"Who can knit a lot - good, who can knit a pair - also great. Well, another soldier will get warm, one who saves us from a great evil that is destroying our cities, killing our people and ruining lives all over the world," they claim.

Olga says that her village nowadays is home to Bulgarian, Ukrainian and Gagauz people. She told her story without taking her eyes off her knitting.

She says that local people have been sheep breeders since ancient time, ending up with plenty of wool to spin and knit socks and woollen sleeveless cardigans.

"And we all lived in harmony, no one insulted anyone. And I've been knitting since I was little. My mother taught me to knit with two needles, with four, and also with one," says the woman.

Maksym Spasov, singer: We must Move on despite the Reality We Live in

Svetlana Dragneva



The young Bulgarian Maksym Spasov works and writes music in Kyiv. He recently released his first song dedicated to the war in Ukraine. With it, the 30-year-old man sends a message that life goes on. Maksym was born in Odessa into a family with two cultures - Bulgarian and Ukrainian. His father, Boris Spasov, a Bulgarian from the village of Zadunayevka, Bessarabia, a long-time chairman of the Odessa Bulgarian Society, played a great role in his upbringing. It was the father who inculcated his son with love of things Bulgarian.

Here is what Maksym told BTA.

Maksym, tell us about your creative path.

Throughout my childhood, like all singers, I dreamed of the stage and of making people happy with my creative work. It turns out that not everything is as we see it in our dreams. But of one thing I am sure - if you desire something very strongly, it is bound to come true. If not now, then later. This is precisely what happened in my life. During my school years I was actively involved in the creative activities of the school, such as concerts, plays, etc.

At my parents' insistence, I had to follow my elder brother's example. I was admitted to the Odessa National Maritime University. But as time went by, I realized that I had not chosen my own path, and I started attending the Odessa Academic Theatre of Musical Comedy named after Mikhail Vodyanoy. I gained much experience during my three years of acting in that theatre which still helps me today.

You have also been in China for a few years. What was it like working there, in a different culture?

Yes, I was offered a contract in China and I couldn't help

but agree to realize my long-time dream. It was difficult and exciting at the same time. Every month a new city, a new scene, new people. I sensed that I was paid more attention there and that people notice your every move. I participated in many big projects where millions of people are watching you at the same time. For China it's nothing, but for me it was incredible.

I am a person who can adapt to any conditions. But what I will never get used to is living without my family, friends and the country where I was born.

"Ukraine, Live" is the name of your first original song. How was it born?

Our lives changed on February 24 [2022]. I was in Kyiv from the first day of the war. For a long time, none of us could figure out how to carry on. But I realized that we had to move on despite the reality we found ourselves in. Then I asked myself what I personally could do to help people. And I decided that I should write a song that could help everyone. A song that would inspire and maybe help someone move on.



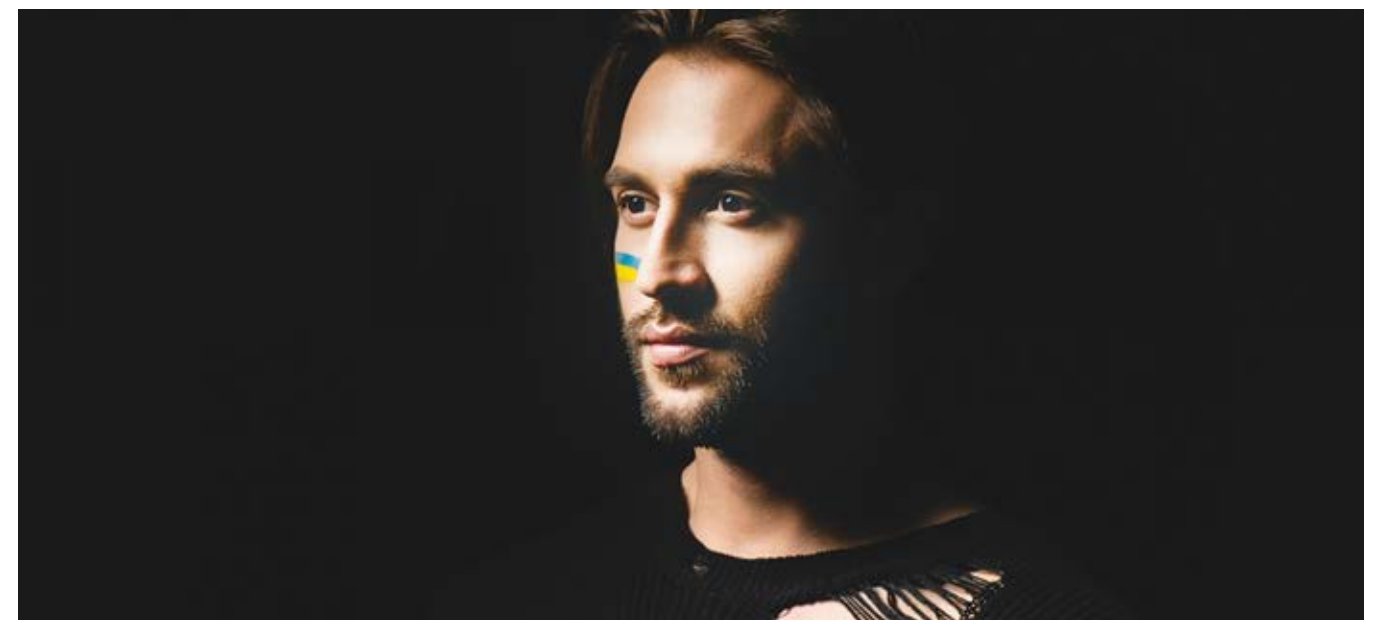
Maksym, you were born into a Bulgarian family and you have Bulgarian roots. What do they mean to you?

My Bulgarian roots are a legacy which is always with me. Following my father's example, I spent a lot of time at the All-Ukrainian Centre of Bulgarian Culture in Odessa from a young age. I felt I was part of a big Bulgarian family there. Bulgarian culture and music had a great influence on me. I still sing the song "For You, Bulgaria". I am also thrilled when I remember

my participation and winning the Mr Bulgarian 2010 contest in Odessa. I was only 18 at the time. All this is an integral part of me.

Your plans for the future?

I want to continue writing new songs, to help people, to participate in the rebuilding of the Ukrainian state. We should appreciate every minute of our lives. We must not give up.



Photos: Maksym Spasov's archive

Yordan Eftimov Wrote the World's First Book of Poetry about the War in Ukraine

BTA



The poet Yordan Eftimov has collected poems about the war in Ukraine in the book "Before They Wash the Blood". It was launched in December at the Sofia International Literary Festival by its author and Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov.

"This book is a kind of lyrical diary, the poems collected in it were really written from the last days of February to mid-September 2022. This is the first time I have dated my poems, but they are not arranged chronologically. So this is a lyrical diary with a difference," Eftimov said.

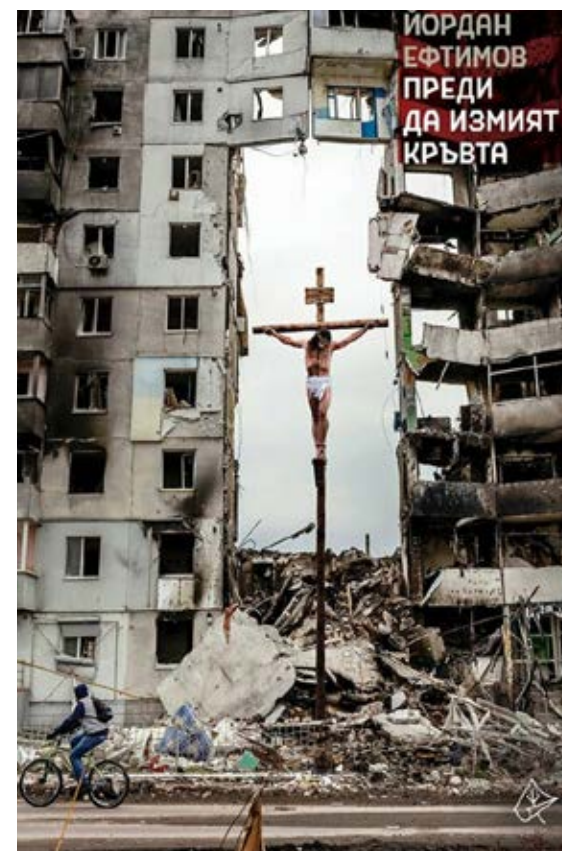
"The poems are part of a flow of making sense of what is happening. Therefore 'a book of poems' is not the most accurate description. I must admit that the poems in this book are an attempt to cope with the news coverage, particularly with the photos and videos which bombarded us on social media, but that's not quite true. Actually, I had to deal with the flow of stories, of narratives which emerged in the context of the war. I couldn't make sense of, and write texts about, many of those narratives. Maybe I'll continue to write about and in relation to this war. Indeed, my main concern was to try to come to terms with what confronts me on a daily basis and has been with me to this day," he said.

"This war is very important to us because it has reminded us of five or six things we have forgotten or failed to see. First, that humanity is constantly at war. We were living under the

illusion that there had not been a war in Europe for 70 years. We had forgotten that there was a war in Yugoslavia only 20 years ago, very close to us, and that missiles fell in Bulgarian villages. Second, we had forgotten that man lives in war. Third, we may have failed to see that this war in Ukraine has been going on at least since 2014, not since February 2022. Fourth, we did not see, or at least I myself was not aware, that Bulgaria has been involved in this war since day one," Yordan Eftimov said.

"Russia's yellow media, which are very powerful, often mention [clairvoyant] Vanga's prophecies about the victory of Russian arms. So we are already involved in the war, even if it is only through Vanga," he added. "And I really think that the best way this war can end for Bulgaria is with the total defeat of Russian arms. Not for the sake of the world and for the sake of the right cause or because the aggressor must always lose - though I agree with all this; in the most pragmatic terms, we Bulgarians will only save ourselves from the Russian boot if someone else defeats the Russian boot. That is, if we want freedom from Russian influence in Bulgaria, someone else has to win it for us, in this case the Ukrainians," Yordan Eftimov said.

"This is the first book of poems about the war in Ukraine in world literature," said Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov. In his



words, the author of "Before They Wash the Blood" acts like a true classic intellectual. "In terms of lifestyle, he can hardly be put into the matrix of the classic intellectual, but this gesture makes him one absolutely. Because, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, who said 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent,' here it is the other way around - whereof one must be silent, thereof one must speak," Lozanov said.

"War must be talked about. The intellectual has a duty to talk about things which must not be kept silent and which must not be clothed in silence. Such a tendency, that the war in Ukraine should be clad in silence, began slowly at the beginning of the war and grew gradually, so that now the war is, generally speaking, in a cloud of silence. In a sense, Yordan Eftimov's book is a battle with Russian propaganda. And it is quite a vivid battle, with a lot of poetic potential, including the fact that Russian propaganda is present with its own clichés in quite a few subjects of the poem," Assoc. Prof. Lozanov said.

The poetry book comprises 62 war notes, including "This Is Not the First War," "Thus Spoke Vanga, Shoigu, and the Shamans," "Lost in the Fake News," "Cannibal Tanks and Tanks Waiting for Transplants," "War is a Permanent Profit for Absolutely Everyone," "The Council of Drones," "Options for the End of War," and "Trenches as Works of Art."

"What kind of war is Yordan Eftimov showing us? Apparently, some foreign, distant war, filtered through serial media images hatched in the monitors of propaganda, apparently some meta-war, a war from a distance. But it is in that distance of thousands of miles that the poet manages to do the near-impossible - to name pain through irony, to tell the man from the monster, honesty from lies, paint from blood. The blood which has not been washed away yet. A true contemporary anti-war book," said New Bulgarian University Rector Plamen Doynov who, together with Boyko Penchev, is the editor of the poetry collection.

The cover illustration is by Stanislav Belovski. The visual artist based his work accompanying Eftimov's poems on a shot of the destroyed town of Borodianka by photographer Ivor Prickett.



Bessarabian Bulgarians in the BTA news

With their everyday life, festivals, occasions for joy and pride and the hardships they face, Bessarabian Bulgarians have always been present in the BTA news flow. Some stories come from within the country, others come from without – and in the background is Bulgaria reaching out a helping hand.

The next pages offer a snippet of these stories from the BTA English-language service.

28.04.2015

35 Ukrainian Refugees Settle in Gourkovo

Stara Zagora, Southern Bulgaria - Thirty-five refugees fleeing the horrors of the war in Ukraine have settled in the central Bulgarian town of Gourkovo in a month, businessman Kolyo Atanassov told BTA on Tuesday.

Early in March, Atanassov, who is a descendant of Bessarabian Bulgarians from Ukraine, and Gourkovo Mayor Stoyan Bonev announced that the town can receive refugees from Ukraine and offer them shelter and jobs.

Those who have arrived include two families with four children each, the youngest of them being just nine months old. Some of the Ukrainians have no money at all. Most of the men hold one or more university degrees and half of them speak Bulgarian. There are engineers and a university teacher.

All settlers are accommodated at local people's homes in Gourkovo, and Atanassov has seen to it that they have a livelihood. Some of the children attend kindergarten. More families are expected to arrive by the end of April.

Atanassov says there are three problems: the problem of long-term residence status, the right to work, and accelerated visa procedures. They can only be solved through legislative changes, he said.

The issues were discussed at a working meeting at Gourkovo Town Hall on Tuesday. The meeting was attended by Mayor Stoyan Bonev and Ukrainian MP Anton Kisse.

05.10.2018

PM Borissov: Bulgarians in Ukraine Will Always Be Bridge for Cooperation between the Two Countries

Odessa, Ukraine - The Ukrainian citizens of Bulgarian origin will always be a bridge for understanding and cooperation between the two countries, said here on Friday Prime Minister Boyko Borissov during a meeting with Ukraine's President Petro

Poroshenko, the government information service reported.

The two attended celebrations of the 160th anniversary of the G. S. Rakovski High School in the Ukrainian town of Bolhrad, which is predominantly populated by ethnic Bulgarians.

Borissov described the joint observance of the school's anniversary as an expression of the two countries' shared understanding of the importance to preserve the linguistic and cultural identity of the Bulgarian community in Ukraine.

Borissov said the continuation of this policy is the best guarantee that the Bulgarians in Ukraine will continue to serve as a bridge for cooperation between Ukraine, Bulgaria and the EU, and be a factor for Ukraine's European perspective.

The Ukrainian President thanked the Bulgarian government for its efforts during the Bulgarian EU Presidency in the context of the Ukraine-EU relations, including the financial assistance for his country.

The two leaders praised the traditionally good relations between Bulgaria and Ukraine which rest on strong historical, cultural and linguistic ties. The two described this as proof of the two countries' mutual recognition as important and high-priority partners.

Ukraine's pro-European orientation, as well as the shared Euro-Atlantic values, additionally enhance these relations and create the basis for their further reinforcement in all areas of mutual interest, the Bulgarian Government leader noted.

The meeting also focused on broadening bilateral trade and cooperation. Borissov and Poroshenko noted last year's 15 per cent increase of Ukrainian tourists who visited Bulgaria.

It transpired after the meeting that Bulgaria will provide a building in central Sofia for an Ukrainian culture centre whereas Ukraine will provide a building for a Bulgarian school in Odessa. The buildings should be made available within a month.

Borissov also said that 30 students from the Bolhrad school will be coming to Sofia on a camp.

He said that the Bulgarian government has provided 150,000 leva for equipment and facilities in the Bolhrad school.

Deputy Prime Minister Simeonov thanked President Poroshenko for the cooperation, tolerance and conditions that the Ukrainian community creates for the preservation of the Bulgarian community.

Vice President Iliana Iotova also visited Bolhrad for the school's anniversary and left as a gift a lithography print by Nikolay Pavlovich titled "Bulgarians' Dream of Freedom". "The history of the Bolhrad high school is a history of Bulgaria," she said, describing the school as having contributed to Bulgaria's national liberation ideology.

Iotova presented President Rumen Radev's Badge of Honour to the high school's principal, Snezhana Skorich, for the school's contribution to the Bulgarian language education of dozens of generations of students, as well as its role for preserving the traditions of Bessarabian Bulgarians.

BTA's special correspondents Teodora Tsaneva and Antoan Nikolov contributed to this story.

31.10.2021

Monument to Gen. Ivan Inzov Unveiled in Taraclia

Taraclia, Moldova - Representatives of Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova and Russia unveil a monument in Taraclia to General Ivan Inzov, who is venerated by the Bessarabian Bulgarians. The monument was opened by the head of Taraclia region, Ivan Paslar, Bulgarian Ambassador in Moldova Evgeni Stoychev, the chair of the association of Bulgarians abroad, Mladen Stanev, head of Rossotrudnichestvo in Moldova Andrey Muravyov, and the head of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine, Svetlana Dragneva.

Ivan Nikitich Inzov (1768-1845) is a Russian officer and administrator. In 1818, he became head of the board of trustees of foreign colonials in South Russia and played an important role in organizing the Bulgarian colonies in Bessarabia.

General Inzov is deeply respected by the Bulgarian community in Bessarabia. After his death, his body was taken to Bolhrad, the main Bulgarian town in the region. A mausoleum was erected, where the body was laid to rest, which can be found on the town's coat of arms. The village of Inzovka, founded by Bulgarian settlers in 1861, is named after him.

28.02.2022

Bulgarians in Taraclia Worry about Situation in Ukraine

The military conflict in Ukraine is a cause for concern among ethnic Bulgarians in the Moldovan city of Taraclia, according to locals who talked to BTA.

Some of the views they shared are that the problem may impact Moldova, the world has changed, there will be huge consequences from the conflict which will reflect mostly on the people.

Alexandr Borimecicov from Taraclia, who heads the Bulgarian Spirit Foundation, said that the conflict will have a



huge impact not only in Ukraine but in Russia as well. "That's where my brother lives. I talked with him yesterday (Sunday) and told him that the economy will suffer severely from the sanctions. There will be huge problems across the world, the prices will rise again and we will feel it," he said.

Nobody believes that things will come to this, that military action will be taken, Borimecicov said. Many people from Taraclia live in Ukraine, they move to Bolhrad, to Odessa. "I have cousins there, one of them lives in Odessa and the other in Bolhrad. Until the last moment we did not believe that such military actions could start," he said. The news has worried everyone and when the military actions started people were really scared. "I see it in my parents, whom I constantly tell to stop watching and reading the news. I don't believe that what they're showing on TV is true. The conflict is in a neighboring country and we're 30 km away from Ukraine, we're neighbors, we live close by and what is happening there could quickly spill over here and nobody will feel it," he said. According to him, the situation impacts the people. Many have managed to move on the first day of military action in Ukraine before the borders were closed for males between the ages of 18 and 60, he said.

Borimecicov hopes that the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, which started, would lead to an end of the military actions, but he does not believe that will be the case. According to him, the most dangerous thing that may happen is for Ukraine to cease existing as a state.

Vitaliy Todorov, a Bessarabian Bulgarian from Taraclia, sees other risks. Moldova is importing food from Ukraine, which he believes could have a huge impact on food supplies in stores. Food supplies may be interrupted in the near future and what's available will be bought, while new products from the EU would be more expensive and that would make people's lives even more difficult, Todorov commented. It's seemingly calm, but the society is currently divided, he said, explaining that he is worried that the situation could spill into Moldova. "Just as people did not think that things in Ukraine could pan out in such a way, it cannot be excluded that it this may happen here, because we have the Transnistria, which is a hotspot, which thank God, has been like a dormant volcano for many years, but its eruption is not excluded", Vitaiy said. He believes that people must not exclude such a possibility and be more vigilant. The most important thing is the safety of every man's family. The people in Moldova should also take steps to ensure the safety of the family. People are seeking safety here, the majority are just passing through Moldova,

because the situation in Ukraine has been complicated for years. It would be difficult for the conflict to end soon and there will be serious consequences for everyone around it, he said.

The situation is stable and normal, all stores and banks are open, people are not feeling anything for now, except for what they see happening and it's very difficult to fight the surge of information coming from all directions, said Evgeniy Nikoforov, who manages a transport company and was born in Russia and graduated university in Sofia. Nobody knows what will happen, everyone is afraid because they know things will not be the same as they were five days ago. According to Evgeniy, the situation across the whole world will change because of the events in Ukraine. He gave as an example the sanctions, which will lead to countersanctions and other consequences.

In this situation, people are giving all they've got to make the lives of those who need it better. If they have relatives, who have the means to come from Ukraine, of course everyone will welcome them. "It's the human thing to do and everyone is aware that they could be in the same situation," Evgeniy commented. Commenting the situation, he said that there are currently so many factors at play that he has absolutely no idea how things may end.

Taracchia is currently calm, there are not many people or cars. People, however, do not know what to expect or do, as they have no clue how things will be in a few days, Evgeniy Nikoforov said.

07.03.2022



Trade Unions Calls for Resettlement Programme for Bulgarians from Ukraine, Moldova

Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) President Plamen Dimitrov called for an urgent plan for the long-term resettlement of members of the Bulgarian community in Ukraine. He recalled that for two years, CITUB has been calling for a national programme for long-term resettlement of Bessarabian Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova. Dimitrov was speaking at a forum on gender equality at work during the COVID-19 epidemic on Monday.

The forum is organized by CITUB in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

CITUB calls for resolving the conflict through peaceful

means so that 1.5 million refugees are able to return to their homes. The trade union condemns all actions that caused civilian casualties, drove out thousands from their homes and instilled horror and fear among millions of Europeans.

According to Dimitrov, in view of the demographic crisis in Bulgaria, CITUB has urged the government to take measures for the resettlement of Bulgarians from Ukraine in partnership with trade unions and employers.

CITUB argues that Bulgarians in Ukraine need support and security at the moment and at the same time Bulgaria should make efforts to attract people with Bulgarian self-awareness due to the heavy demographic crisis in this country.

07.03.2022



Over 40 Bessarabian Bulgarians to Be Evacuated from Moldova

Bulgaria's Ambassador in Chisinau Evgueni Stoytchev told the Foreign Ministry in Sofia that 40 Bulgarians wishing to be evacuated will leave for Bulgaria on Tuesday.

Foreign Minister Teodora Genchovska, who will visit Moldova on Tuesday, will take the Bulgarians on her flight back to Sofia.

"We continue to evacuate Bulgarians and Bulgarian citizens who wish to be evacuated," the Foreign Minister said after meeting with the Bulgarian Ambassador to Ukraine Kostadin Kodjabashev and Bulgaria's Consul General in Odessa Svetoslav Ivanov.

Genchovska said that the 1,000 Bulgarian nationals who have been evacuated from Ukraine since the start of the military conflict there are almost all permanent and temporary residents there.

As from March 6, the Foreign Ministry, jointly with the Defence Ministry, organize daily bus services from the Moldovan border with Ukraine and from the Moldovan border with Romania to Varna for Bulgarian citizens and Bessarabian Bulgarians.

Some 150,000 Bulgarians resettled from Southeastern Bulgaria to Wallachia, Bessarabia (which now is divided between present-day Moldova and Southwest Ukraine), Russia and Southern Ukraine between 1774 and 1852 in the wake of several Russo-Turkish wars.

14.03.2022

Fundraiser to Aid Ukraine's Tuzlovsky Limani Nature Park

A campaign launched by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) is raising funds for the Tuzlovsky Limani [Tuzly Lagoons] National Nature Park in southern Bessarabia, Ukraine. The donated money will go into basic necessities, medicinal products and equipment for the park management, including tents, blankets, observation tubes, and power banks.

The fundraiser was launched last week and is open-ended. It has already received the support of the National Museum of Natural History with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

The Tuzlovsky Limani National Nature Park was established in 2010 to protect a group of marine lagoons on an area exceeding 20,000 ha. The coastal area is a wintering and nesting ground for thousands of waterfowl. Over 250 species of birds have been registered here, or 60 per cent of all bird species in Ukraine.

The BSPB said in a press release that it has been working with the park management on the LIFE for Safe Flight project, with the Ukrainian partners being responsible for monitoring wintering birds and combating poaching. Among the staff is Dr. Ivan Rusev, a Bessarabian Bulgarian who as an environmentalist and ornithologist has been working to preserve Ukraine's biodiversity for decades.

Those wishing to participate in the fundraiser can donate to the BSPB's account on <https://crm.bspb.org/>. All currencies accepted.

06.04.2022

2,000 Bulgarians Leave Odessa Since Start of War in Ukraine

Some 2,000 Bulgarians have left Odessa since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Elena Volkova of the Association of Bulgarians in Ukraine told BTA.

"Six thousand Bulgarians live in Odessa. Many of them remained, but they want to evacuate and call every day. The people are afraid to remain in the city. Our association's team, headed by Anton Kisse, its president and member of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), continues to make up lists, organize buses and evacuate people to Bulgaria," Volkova told BTA.

According to her information, food and fuel prices in Ukraine have spiked and some filling stations are short of fuel. Shops are open, but variety is limited. Staples are out. That is why there are hundreds of aid centres in Odessa where strategic food and medicines are stocked. Bulgaria, Turkey, Poland and France send humanitarian aid.

"Shopping centres, restaurants, cafes, theatres have started to open, even the city zoo did. Curfew was reduced last week. The state has called on business to begin functioning

as much as possible, so that Odessa lives. With the coming of spring, people began to go to the parks and stroll along the city beaches. And, when they hear the sirens they no longer react or hide in bomb shelters. They have adapted to the situation," says Elena, who is a Bessarabian Bulgarian.

Although she has the opportunity, Elena is adamant that she will not leave Ukraine. "We could have gone to a safer place with my child, but we decided to stay here. I will remain in Odessa for now, for it offers more communication, more opportunities to help people in need, to help evacuate Bulgarians in Bessarabia and all Ukraine," Elena adds.

15.04.2022



Photo Exhibition in Sofia Features Scenes of the War in Ukraine

An open-air photo exhibition in Sofia features scenes of the war in Ukraine. It was opened in front of the NDK Congress Centre on Friday by Deputy Mayor Miroslav Borshosh, Ukrainian Ambassador to Bulgaria Vitaly Moskalenko and Prof. Mikhail Stanchev of Kharkiv University, a Bessarabian Bulgarian who fled the war.

Borshosh said the exhibition expressed support for the Ukrainians. "Sofia shares in the pain and suffering of the Ukrainian people," he added.

Ambassador Moskalenko thanked the Deputy Mayor for the support Sofia Municipality has offered to Ukrainian refugees.

The exhibition is on until April 29.

11.05.2022



Bessarabian Bulgarians Urge Opening of Bulgarian Consulate in Bolhrad

Bessarabian Bulgarians call for opening of Bulgarian consulate in Bolhrad. The leadership of the Rodolyubets [Patriot] cultural society for relations with Bessarabian and Tavrian Bulgarians wrote to Foreign Minister Teodora

Genchovska urging opening of a Bulgarian consulate in the town of Bolhrad, Odessa region (Ukraine), Maria Popova, editor-in-chief of the Obozrenie Plyus daily, told BTA on Wednesday.

The letter to Genchovska says that the current situation in Ukraine makes it urgent to open a Bulgarian consulate in Bolhrad. "It is known that many of our compatriots have temporarily settled near the Moldavian and Romanian borders. In addition to serving the needs of many Bulgarians in the region, a Bulgarian consulate could perform logistical functions and coordinate humanitarian, cultural and educational projects," the letter says.

The request to open a Bulgarian consulate in Bolhrad, which is the unofficial centre of the Bessarabian Bulgarian community, has been made more than once by Bulgarians in the Bolhrad region, and an official letter to the same effect has been sent to the Foreign Ministry by the Bolhrad City Council.

Some 150,000 Bulgarians resettled from Southeastern Bulgaria to Wallachia, Bessarabia (which now is divided between present-day Moldova and Southwest Ukraine), Russia and Southern Ukraine between 1774 and 1852 in the wake of several Russo-Turkish wars.

Since its founding in the 1820s, Bolhrad has been a cultural centre of the Bulgarian community in Bessarabia.

28.06.2022



Bessarabian Bulgarians May Be Left without University of Taraclia

The Bessarabian Bulgarians in Moldova may be left without the Grigory Tsamblak University of Taraclia, Ivan Paslar, chairman of the Taraclia regional council, said at a briefing in the National Assembly organized by the Vazrazhdane parliamentary group. Vazrazhdane leader Kostadin Kostadinov insisted on immediate actions by the Bulgarian State to preserve the only Bulgarian public university abroad.

Paslar said that the Moldovan Education Ministry is unifying all universities in Moldova in its aim to reform the sector. "This is their right, but the University of Taraclia is something different," he added.

Paslar stated that the university was created in 2004 by

Bulgarian and Moldovan presidential decrees. "Yesterday [Monday], the Moldovan Education Minister decided to liquidate the University of Taraclia," he argued, commenting on the conversion of the University of Taraclia to a department of a university in Chisinau. Since 2020, the Bulgarian Education Ministry has been insisting that the University of Taraclia should be a department of the Angel Kunchev University of Ruse. The Bulgarian side has proposed that to the Moldovan Education Ministry, calling on them to consider this request, Paslar also said.

Kostadinov recalled another similar case concerning Bulgarian-Moldovan relations. Fifteen years ago, there were serious intentions to eliminate the distinctiveness of the Bulgarian community in Moldova, he said, adding that this did not happen then, thanks to the active Bulgarian policy and work of the Bulgarian Ambassador to Moldova. "Currently, we are facing such a crisis for the second time," Kostadinov said.

He added that Vazrazhdane will inform outgoing Prime Minister Kiril Petkov, Interior Minister Boyko Rashkov and Education Minister Nikolay Denkov of the case.

12.08.2022



Bessarabian of Bulgarian Origin to Represent Moldova at European, World Wrestling Championships

A Bessarabian man of Bulgarian origin, Demian Liutcanov, will represent Moldova at the freestyle European and World Wrestling Championships. Liutcanov will compete in the men's 57.0 kg discipline.

Liutcanov comes from Taraclia and trains for the local Olympian Club. He began training when he was nine and is a champion of Moldova several times over.

This year he also won the U-23 Bulgarian championship.

The World Wrestling Championships 2022 are scheduled for September.

26.08.2022

Town of Bolhrad Marks 201st Anniversary

The town of Bolhrad, founded by the Bulgarian settlers in Bessarabia in 1821, celebrated its 201st anniversary. Throughout its history it has been the major hub of Bessarabian Bulgarians and played an important role in



the Bulgarian Revival. In 1838, the Cathedral of the Holy Transfiguration of the Lord was built there with funds from ethnic Bulgarians in the region. In 1858, the first Bulgarian high school "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" was opened. It gave Bulgaria notable figures such as Aleksandar Malinov, Georgi Todorov, Danail Nikolaev, Ivan Kolev, Dimitar Grekov, Yov Titorov, Aleksandar Teodorov-Balan, Dimitar Agura, Ivan Vulpe and others.

Bolhrad has remained the centre of the Bulgarians in Ukraine even in most recent times, after the independence of that country. Because of the war, this year's celebrations were not as grand as usual.

"We are not celebrating like we have in previous years for obvious reasons. We believe that the armed forces of Ukraine will prevail. We have many more celebrations and victories ahead of us, which we will surely celebrate under the peaceful skies of Ukraine," said Bolhrad Mayor Sergey Dimitriev.

The concert programme was not as large-scale as last year, but it delighted residents and guests of the town, including many refugees from other regions of Ukraine.

22.09.2022

Bulgarian Community in Moldova Celebrates Bulgaria Independence Day

The Bulgarian community in Moldova marked the 114th anniversary of the declaration of Bulgaria's independence in front of the Bulgarian Militia Memorial in Cisinou. Students from the Vassil Levski Bulgarian Lyceum recounted the events of September 22, 1908 and sang Bulgarian folk songs.

The gathering was addressed by the Bulgarian Ambassador to Moldova, Evgeny Syoichev, who spoke of the historic significance of the day for the Bulgarian people, as well as by the Chairman of the Taraclia regional council, Ivan Paslar.

The Chairman of the Academic Society of Bulgarian Studies in Moldova, historian Ivan Duminica, spoke about the part played by the then prime minister of the Principality of Bulgaria, Alexander Malinov, in the declaration of Bulgaria's independence. Besides everything else, Malinov was of Bessarabian Bulgarian origin. Duminica also explained why the date should be marked by the Bulgarian Militia Memorial.

Even before the Russo-Turkish War of Liberation of 1877-

1878, the first Bulgarian volunteers to fight for Bulgaria's freedom from Ottoman rule gathered in what is today Cisinou in the fall of 1876. These 700 or so men were supported by the Cisinou Bulgarian Society. The first regular militia of some 300, mainly from Cisinou and Southern Bessarabia, began on March 31, 1877.

Finally, flowers were laid at the memorial in honour of the memory of all who contributed to Bulgaria's independence.



28.09.2022



Bulgarian Ensembles from Bessarabia Win Prizes at Folklore Festival in Balchik

Bulgarian folk ensembles and Ukrainian vocal ensembles from the town of Reni and the village of Novi Troiani, Bolhrad Region, won prizes at the Sea of Rhythms International Folklore Festival. This was their first participation in it.

The festival was held for the 12th time in a row in the seaside town of Balchik on September 22-25. Around 1,300 performers from 16 Bulgarian regions and from Ukraine took part in the festival.

The jury awarded first and second place in the International Choirs category to the ensembles from the Regional Centre for National Cultures in Reni - Kalina, Roden Krai and Forte. Bulgarian Hearts from Novi Troiani is third.

In the Under-18 Individual Performers category, 10-year-old Ivan Ivanov from Novi Troiani won first place.

"To us, this is important and exciting," Nina Ivanova, methodologist at the Traditions and Customs Department of the Centre in Reni, told BTA.

During their visit to Bulgaria, the group of Bessarabian Bulgarians gave concerts in several settlements in Varna Region.

28.10.2022



BTA Opens New Venue of Press Club in Moldovan Town of Taracليا

The Bulgarian News Agency (BTA) opened Friday a new venue of its press club in Taracليا, Moldova. The new venue is located in one of the halls of the Taracليا University and was opened in the presence of Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, who was on a two-day visit to Moldova at the invitation of his Moldovan counterpart Maia Sandu. The visit marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The press club's opening is a continuation of BTA's policy to have its own media venues in all neighbouring countries, as well as countries with large Bulgarian communities.

"I would like to wish for this press club to reinforce the ties and offer the Bulgarian community an even stronger inclusion," said President Radev.

BTA Director General Kiril Valchev said that BTA's press club in Taracليا has found a new home during a symbolic year, when the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Moldova is observed, as well as on the eve of the Day of Bessarabian Bulgarians (October 29). BTA's late Director General Maxim Minchev announced the opening of BTA's press club in Taracليا back in 2017 during the 13th World Meeting of Bulgarian Media. The Agency had been using until now a room of the local administration on an as-needed basis, for which it thanks the local authorities, Valchev said, adding that thanks to the University of Taracليا and its Rector Prof. Maria Paslar, BTA now has a new hall in the town's centre.

On Friday Radev visited Taracليا, which is predominantly populated by ethnic Bulgarians, and where he joined the celebrations of the Day of Bessarabian Bulgarians, October 29, which is one of the most important holidays of the Bulgarian community in Moldova.

28.10.2022



Sofia to Host Festival of Bessarabian Bulgarians on Saturday

A festival marking the Day of Bessarabian Bulgarians will be held in Sofia on October 29, the City Hall said.

This is a joint initiative of the Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, the Centre of Bessarabian Bulgarians in Bulgaria and the Rodolubets Association.

Awards will be given for the extended hand and open heart to Bessarabian Bulgarians during the war in Ukraine.

Bessarabian Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova and Banat Bulgarians from Romania will perform on a stage in front of the National Palace of Culture. There will be stalls offering traditional Bessarabian food and wine.

29.10.2022



Sofia Festival Marks Bessarabian Bulgarians Day

The Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, the Centre of Bessarabian Bulgarians in Bulgaria and the Rodolubets Association held a one-day festival on Saturday to mark the Bessarabian Bulgarians Day. The festival was organized with the support of the Sofia Municipality and the Triaditza borough, the Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad said.

An awards ceremony at the NDK National Palace of Culture recognized compatriots who opened their hearts in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Performers from Ukraine, Moldova and Banat shared the stage outside the NDK. Traditional Bessarabian wines and foods were on display.

The Bessarabian Bulgarians Day was also celebrated with observances at the Central Military Club, organized by the Rodolubets Association, promoting peace and understanding between the peoples.

Bessarabian Bulgarians carry the purest and strongest idea of love for the motherland, said President Rumen Radev during a visit to Taracليا, Moldova this week. Moldovan President Maia Sandu took part in the ceremony marking the Bessarabian Bulgarians Day.

23.11.2022



BGN 1 Mln Grant Extended to Taracليا University in Moldova

The Bulgarian government on Wednesday extended a BGN 1 million grant to Gregory Tsamblak Taracليا State University in Moldova. The money will be made available via the Foreign Ministry budget for 2022. It is in line with the Bulgarian government's consistent and targeted policy for guaranteeing and realizing the rights and interests of the Bulgarian communities abroad while abiding by local law and international norms, the Government Information Service said.

Visiting Taracليا State University on the eve of Bessarabian Bulgarians Day (October 29), President Rumen Radev said Bulgaria will make efforts to find a sustainable solution for the university's development. He said preserving the region of Taracليا as a separate territorial unit is important for the rights of the Bulgarian community.

21.12.2022

Access to Electricity Unpredictable, Bessarabian Bulgarians in Ukraine Say

There is no exact schedule for when electricity is turned on and off in Bessarabia, local ethnic Bulgarians from the Ukrainian cities of Bolhrad and Odessa told BTA on Wednesday. A total of 25 stationary points for access to a generator have been provided in the settlements of Bolhrad region.



There, residents have the opportunity to charge their mobile devices, rest and warm up. In addition, there are also electrical appliances for preparing hot drinks, reported the Bolhrad administration.

"The population does not know at what time and for how long there will be electricity. For most of the day there is no electricity. We have gotten used to it. We charge phones, prepare food, do laundry at night, that's when there is electricity. The bad thing is that it can be turned off at any point and nothing can be planned ahead of time. There are also issues with drinking water in the city. Due to the lack of electricity, the water is poorly purified. The situation in the villages is even worse. However, our people are strong, they try not to panic and hang in there, because life goes on," commented Nataliya Ruseva, a resident of Bolhrad.

"The Bulgarian centre works mainly without electricity during the day. It is very complicated because there is no internet and nothing can be planned, even for a few days ahead. It is especially complicated for accounting. We prepare the reports and financial documents at night when there is electricity. In Bolhrad, for example, there can be electricity for 2 hours and no electricity for the next 6 hours. A few days ago, generators from Bulgaria were distributed to Bulgarian Sunday schools in the area and to the centre, for which we are grateful," said the director of the regional centre for Bulgarian culture in Bolhrad, Galina Ivanova. She added: "However, the generators run on gasoline, which is not of good quality here, and they cannot work well. Also, gasoline is very expensive, and this raises other concerns."

Regarding the situation in Odessa and the activities of the All-Ukrainian Center for Bulgarian Culture in Odessa, its director Dmitry Terzi said that despite the complications, the organization of cultural events has not stopped. "The doors of the centre are open. We try to organize charity concerts and exhibitions as much as possible. When the electricity goes out during an event, we light candles. People don't want to leave and so we continue. The Bulgarian Sunday School works during the day in the daylight," he pointed out.

Terzi said that there is a lack of water and gas in some places, and when the electricity is turned off, it is very difficult to prepare food. "We're used to it. We are managing," Terzi added.

As a result of the attacks on critical infrastructure facilities, Ukraine's energy system has to be restored. In the Odessa region, power outages continue. This will continue until the situation in the power system stabilizes, informed the Bolhrad District Military Administration on its website.

21.12.2022



Bolhrad Regional Centre for Bulgarian Culture Turns 25

The regional centre for Bulgarian culture (RCBC) in the Ukrainian city of Bolhrad turned 25. From both a historical and contemporary standpoint, the city is believed to be a centre of the Bulgarian community in Ukraine. RCBC functions under the department of culture, nationalities, religion and protection of cultural heritage sites in Odessa Oblast, and is financed by the regional budget.

RCBC's Director, Galina Ivanova, said in a BTA interview that the centre has been awarded each year for contributing to the protection of the Bessarabian Bulgarians' culture, mother tongue and traditions, as well as for promoting moral values among the young generation of Bulgarians.

Ivanova said that RCBC's main activities are related to education, science and methodology and cultural research. This is manifested, above all, in promoting the Bulgarian culture and language, reviving Bulgarian traditions and rites. "As a form of work, we have chosen festivals, art exhibitions, contests and meetings with various science and culture figures. A children's folklore ensemble also functions at the centre," she said.

A total of 12 books have been published on RCBC's initiative in the past 20 years, including the Bulgarian Bessarabia collection.

The centre has managed to revive some Bulgarian holidays in Bolhrad and the surrounding region, such as Trifon Zarezan (in honor of Saint Tryphon), St. George's Day and St. Nicholas Day.

Educational courses in Bulgarian language, culture and history of the Bulgarian people have been held at the centre for years. The RCBC also has one of the biggest libraries with Bulgarian classics. The admission of local students into Bulgarian universities serves as proof of the successful educational programmes.

In the past 25 years, the RCBC has been involved in broad cooperation with State and non-governmental organizations from Ukraine and Bulgaria.

During its existence, the centre managed to become a focal point for Bulgarian culture and revival in Bessarabia, Galina Ivanova said.

27.12.2022



Santa Arrives in Taraclia, Invites Children to Visit His Abode

Santa Claus [or Ded Moroz, literally Father Frost] has arrived in Taraclia for the Christmas and New Year season, accompanied by his granddaughter and helper Snegurochka [Snow Maiden]. They have set up house next to the Christmas tree in the city's central square and have invited all children to visit.

Santa gives goodies in return for a song or a recited poem. Anyone who wants to can also have their photo with Santa and Snegurochka taken.

The fairy tale abode was decorated by the staff of the Taraclia Cultural Heritage Museum and the Fun Friday Theatre company in early 20th century Bessarabian Bulgarian style, complete with hand-woven rug on the wall.

The presents, intended for little ones under 10, are hidden in an old wooden chest and a kerosene lamp helps Santa see what the children have wished for in their letters to him, BTA learnt.

03.01.2023



Taraclia Hosts Fifth Authentic Bessarabian Carpets Fest

Right at the end of the outgoing year, Taraclia hosted the fifth edition of the regional festival of authentic Bessarabian kilims – or rugs and carpets, dating from the 18th through the beginning of the 20th century. The event, hosted by the Culture Centre, also featured folk costumes and embroidery samples provided by local cultural clubs from settlements in the region of Taraclia.

The exhibition is part of the republican national carpet fair, Covorul Dorului (or Carpet of Woe) and aims to popularize ethnic carpets, Olga Runtova of the Regional Directorate of Education, Culture and Tourism said.

All participants in the fest were awarded special diplomas for their part in the event.

13.03.2023



Taraclia Council Representatives Visit Trakia University

Representatives of the Regional Council of Taraclia region in Moldova visited Trakia University (TrU) in Stara Zagora, South Bulgaria, TrU reported on its Facebook page on March 10. The delegation and their hosts discussed opportunities for cooperation between TrU and the Taraclia region, specifically with the Gregory Tsamblak State University as the only higher education institution focused on the needs of the Bulgarian Bessarabian community.

The delegation was led by the Deputy Chair of the Regional Council, Alexandr Borimecicov, and the Head of the Department of Education, Culture and Tourism Management of the Regional Council, Lilia Sarsaman. A special guest was Assoc. Prof. Maria Paslar, Rector of the Gregory Tsamblak State University in Taraclia.

The invitation for the visit was extended by the Faculty of Economics at TrU.

The meeting was attended by TrU Rector, Prof. Dobri Yarkov, Vice Rector of Educational Activities, Prof. Neli Grozeva, dean of the Faculty of Economics, Assoc. Prof. Blaga Stoykova, Deputy Dean for Research and International Affairs, Assoc. Prof. Dimitrina Stoyancheva, Deputy Dean of Academic Affairs, Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Penev, and dean of the Faculty of Pedagogy, Prof. Tanya Borisova. Prof. Grozeva presented the guests with the traditional Bulgarian red-and-white charms, martenitsa.

21.03.2023

Bulgarian Company Considers Opportunities for Cooperation with Taraclia Businesses

The Bulgarian company Bulmarket is considering the possibility of cooperation with the businesses in Taraclia District, the regional administration said. The matter of cooperation between Bulgarian and Taraclia entrepreneurs was raised in Ruse, on the Danube, during the meeting



between Taraclia District Chair Ivan Paslar and the president of Bulmarket Stanko Stankov.

Paslar, who is on a working visit to Bulgaria, will meet with partners and local entrepreneurs by the end of the week. The main objective of his visit is to attract Bulgarian investment to the Taraclia district.

During the meeting on Tuesday, the two sides discussed the prospects for cooperation in the field of attracting investments in the Moldovan region, populated by ethnic Bulgarians. Paslar informed Stankov about the free economic zones in the cities of Taraclia and Tvardita, as well as about the industrial potential of the Taraclia region. He invited Stankov to visit Taraclia to learn about the region's economy and the traditions of the Bessarabian Bulgarians.

In early March, Bulmarket donated office equipment worth more than EUR 10,000 to Liceul Teoretic Hristo Botev in the village of Valea Perjei in Taraclia District.

27.03.2023



Smeshen Petak Theatre in Taraclia Marks World Theatre Day with Comedy Premiere

The Bessarabian Bulgarians' Smeshen Petak [Funny Friday] Theatre staged the comedy Hope Clinic to mark World Theatre Day. The production is based on a play by contemporary Russian playwright Aleksandr Korovkin.

Actor and director Viacheslav Kiose translated the text into Bulgarian. The cast included Lyudmila Paslar, Pavel Konstantinov, and Artyom Artyomov [names might be misspelled] among others.

The main character is a clerk, who knows his price and his place. He gets admitted into hospital with a very tricky disease. Unaccustomed to facing this kind of adversity, he brings his intimate and business life within the hospital, involuntarily sharing details of his life with his neighbour. The nurse, the clerk's wife, and his mistress also make an appearance.

An audience member told BTA: "This comedy got me thinking not just about fake news, but also about the way our value system has changed in general. The actors on stage make us consider which human organ we should use when we take in new information. This play is very, very relevant right now, and funny at that."

At the end of the play, the Deputy Mayor of Taraclia Marta Kemencedzi congratulated the troupe. On behalf of the Moldovan Ministry of Culture, she presented Lyudmila Paslar, Viacheslav Kiose, and Pavel Konstantinov with certificates for their contribution to the promotion of theatrical cultural values.

Smeshen Petak Theatre with director Sergey Paslar was founded more than 40 years ago by Ivan Borimecicov [names might be misspelled]. The theatre's repertoire includes mainly plays by Bulgarian classics and contemporary authors. Its mission is to revive and preserve the cultural heritage of the Bessarabian Bulgarians.

Easter Concert in Bolhrad Raises Funds for Military

An Easter concert for the residents of Bolhrad, which has a large ethnic Bulgarian population, took place on the eve of the holy Christian holiday. More than 100 artists from the city took part in the concert, prepared by the Centre for Culture and Recreation of the Bolhrad City Council. Part of the funds raised will be donated to the military at the front.

The 400-seats hall, where the concert was performed, was almost full. All events in Bolhrad since the beginning of the war have started with a minute of silence - in memory of those who died at the front, among whom are also Bessarabian Bulgarians. There is a bomb shelter in the building in case people have to take cover, Zhanna Suslina, head of the department of culture, tourism, youth and sports at the Bolhrad city council, told BTA.

"Such events are very necessary for the people. All our cultural and mass events have two tasks - to bring spirituality to the audience and to support the army. An arts and crafts fair was held in the lobby of the Centre on the day of the concert," said Suslina.

Easter Psalms were also performed.

Bulgarian folk dances and Ukrainian choreographic compositions were staged by the folk ensemble for Bulgarian dances "Bessarabia" headed by Peter Dimitrov, as well as the exemplary ensemble "Inspiration" headed by Victoria Alavatskaya.



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