



# Newsletter

Issue 4, November 2008



## The Class of 2008 of the Regional Program Graduated Successfully

Rarely do people in the Balkans come together in the name of a special cause. This time, however, the participants in the Regional Program of the Bulgarian School of Politics almost succeeded in this. They prepared a Declaration for Regional Cooperation, which they submitted to the Speaker of the National Parliament, Mr. Georgi Pirinski, during the official ceremony at which he awarded them their Certificates for participation in the program.

## The US Policy for the Balkans and the Role of Bulgarian Politicians

On November 18, 2008, in Radisson Hotel in Sofia, young Bulgarian politicians, many of whom alumni of the Bulgarian School of Politics, met with Mr. Stuart E. Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Washington. ( page 3)



## We are here to remove barriers!

Interview with Davor Bernardić (Member of the Croatian Parliament), graduate of the Regional program “Political Debate in Southeastern Europe” 2008. (page 4)



## Why is the topic of protecting the environment not on the agenda of the politicians?



On Thursday, 26 November, we held the regular “Last Thursday” discussion of the Alumni Club of the School of Politics in Sofia.

## The Regional Program of the BSoP Made the Headlines in “Duma”

Ivelin Nikolov, member of the Program Council of the Bulgarian School of Politics (BSoP), was appointed Editor-in-Chief of



“Duma” newspaper. The first issue of the newspaper under his management published the pictures of the participants in the Regional Program on its front page.

Good luck, Ivo!



### Content:

News (pp. 1-4)

Interview with Davor Bernardić (pp. 4-5)

Do you remember? (pp. 5-7)

“Last Thursday” Discussion Club (pp. 8-9)





myths and prejudices existing in our countries.

One main conclusion from the discussion was that the people themselves who live in the region create and spread the view of the Balkans as one of the worst places on earth. Instead, we should get together and begin to create a positive image of ourselves and of our countries. The discussion continued with Vessela Cherneva, who spoke about the future political and economic perspectives before the countries in Southeast Europe. She focused on the lack of enthusiasm and will in the governments in the region, primarily among the politicians, to accelerate the integration of their countries into the EU: in her view, they don't want to be under constant monitoring and control, on top of that, the issue of EU integration does not guarantee votes in the elections.

For the young politicians, however, things look different: they truly believe in the future of their countries as part of the Euro-Atlantic structures, and the reforms their countries need to implement to reach that goal. That was the spirit of the discussion with Dimiter Bechev, who spoke about regional cooperation. He asked them to conduct mock bilateral state negotiations and reach agreements for cooperation. We can't say that the negotiations were successful, as there were no conflicts and prolonged discussions; often, however, such is the political reality in the region.

Then we gave the floor to the media, because it was necessary for the young politicians to 'sell their messages' to the public. Here, we relied on Ivo Hristov, a journalist, to comment on the press conferences organized by the participants. During the improvised press conferences, participants shared the results of their research work on several topics: ethnic parties, continuing education, decentralization in the public administration, the role of the international community in the Balkans.



The public institutions in the country also offered their support to our program: participants visited the Presidency and met with Mr. Dobrin Kanev, adviser to the President; we stopped by the Sofia municipality and met with the Mayor.



At the end of the day, we observed regional cooperation in practice: listening to the tunes of a gypsy band in a traditional Bulgarian restaurant, all of us danced and sang together, and nothing and no one could come between us!



What should be the future of the Regional Program and how can we make it more useful to the young politicians was the topic of the working meeting of the Regional Steering Group. The meeting was attended by Merita, Board Member of the Albanian School; Zenan from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Class 2003; Gordana, Director of the Macedonian School; Nevena, Director of the Croatian School; Ilir from Kosovo School; Micho from Croatia and our moderators Zoran, Daniela, Jani.

## The US Policy for the Balkans and the Role of Bulgarian Politicians



On November 18, 2008, in Radisson Hotel in Sofia, young Bulgarian politicians, many of whom alumni of the Bulgarian School of Politics, met with Mr. Stuart E. Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Washington. The meeting was co-organized by the American Embassy in Bulgaria and the Bulgarian School of Politics.

Mr. Jones, a career member of the Foreign Service, re-joined the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs in July 2008 as Deputy Assistant Secretary with responsibility for the Balkan region. He was previously the Deputy Chief of Mission at the American Embassy in Cairo, Egypt. He has also served at the National Security Council as Director for Iraq and in Iraq, as Governorate Coordinator for Al Anbar Province. Other foreign tours include: Ankara, as political counselor, Adana (Turkey) as principal officer, San Salvador and Bogota. Domestic tours include as deputy director for European regional political military affairs, as Desk officer for Serbia, and at the US Mission to the United Nations, as special assistant to the Permanent Representative.

Mr. Jones spoke about the main principles of the US policy toward the Balkans, the Western Balkans in particular, and underlined how important regional cooperation is both for the region and the US. He also stressed the need to continue working for the stabilization of security in the Balkans and supporting the countries in the region in the process of joining NATO and the EU. Mr. Jones also outlined several conflict areas in the Balkans that will be the focus of the new administration of the US: Serbia, Bosna and Herzegovina, Kosovo. Further in his speech, Mr. Jones stated that the US will continue to provide financial and political support to the region, but he also emphasized the need for all of the countries to cooperate and develop good bilateral and multilateral economic and political relationships. In this respect, he expressed his concern that a prospective accession to the EU should not be the only incentive for the Balkan countries to implement the necessary reforms in their societies; would there be a delay in the process of European enlargement, this could have an adverse effect on the pace of democratic and political reforms in the Balkans.

Responding to questions from the participants, Mr. Jones expressed his hope that the new president-elect of the USA – Mr. Barak Obama – and his new administration will continue to be engaged with the problems of the Balkan countries and the Black Sea Region. He stated that he expected both Democrats and Republicans, led by President Obama, to cooperate on

foreign policy issues, in particular, as concerns cooperation with the EU and a more constructive dialogue with Russia. At the end of the meeting, Ms. Svetlana Lomeva, Director of the Bulgarian School of Politics, asked Mr. Jones to offer his advice to the young leaders in the region. Mr. Jones mentioned two things he sees as very significant for the aspiring politicians: their continued efforts toward economic and political reforms in each of their countries and further development of cooperation, based on multilateral agreements, meetings, exchange visits and shared experiences. With this advice, Mr. Jones actually encouraged and praised a significant practice that the School has been working to establish and maintain for a long time now, through the implementation of the Regional program “The Political Debate in Southeastern Europe.” The program, now in its 6th year, has been gathering together politicians and civic leaders from the countries in the region to discuss important aspects of regional cooperation and improving the lives of citizens in our societies.

## We are here to remove barriers!

*interview with Davor Bernardic*

*What is your general impression of the Regional Program of the Bulgarian School of Politics? What did you learn?*

The Regional program of the Bulgarian School of Politics is a great happening, unique in the Balkan region, which connects young Balkan politicians from different political parties and representatives of civil society. It is also very useful because



Davor Bernardić (Class 2008 of the Regional Program, in the middle) is Member of Croatian Parliament; President of Croatian Social Democratic Youth; Member of the Main Board of Croatian Social Democratic Party.

the courses of study give all participants interesting knowledge of various political skills, presented in unusual ways. Every participant, at the end of the three courses, comes out with more and different skills, experience, and what is maybe most important, with many new contacts with other young people from the region, who may play important role in the future.

### *What changed in your perception about the other countries in the Region?*

I already had some experience in political work in the Balkans. So I knew that the problems that occupy young people in the region are

very common. Young people from all countries in region are striving to solve common issues, such as decent jobs and decent salaries, good living conditions, efficient health care, quality education, as well as mobility, freedom to travel, work and live wherever they want. But many participants who did not have such experience and did not know the differences in the Balkans, probably had some prejudice about other nations based on the picture that history and different regimes have created, or what they may have learned from their parents. We are here to remove barriers, and that is what we tried to do during the seminars of the Regional program.

### *What are the biggest challenges facing the Balkans and how the young politicians can contribute to overcoming them?*

A program like that of the Bulgarian School of Politics is the first step in this important area. As I said above, the Balkans must strive for better connections and communication between the countries and neighboring peoples, they must become more oriented to other member countries and a common trade market. Also, the countries in the region should follow good examples of cooperation from the region and Europe, to find solutions for their own policies and neighbor relationships. We will not receive help from outside until we help ourselves first. No one will give us money, without the expectation for a good return and doubling the investment. Once, Richard Nixon, a former president of the US, said: *"We must always remember that America is a great nation today not because of what the government did for the people but because of what the people have done for themselves and for one another."* In the spirit of that statement is also the Declaration signed by the participants in the Regional program of the Bulgarian School of Politics in Sofia last week. We did that because young people can do it!



## Do you remember?

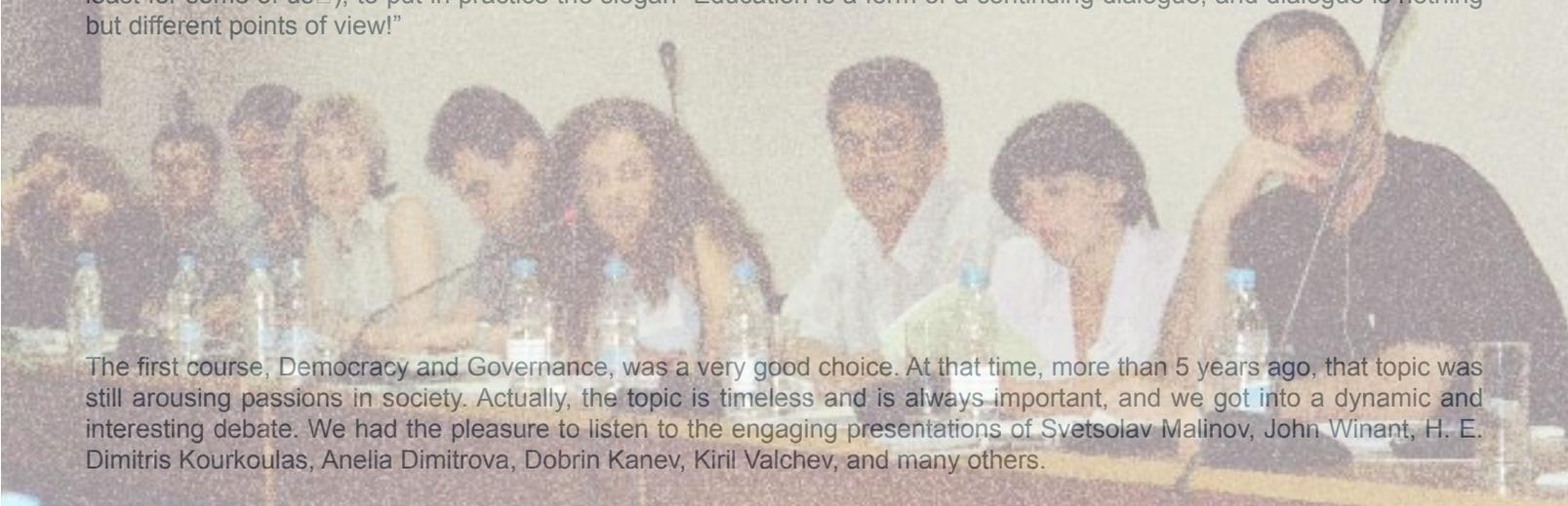
BY ZORNITZA TRIFONOVA, CLASS 2003

One day we were just casually talking, looking back to the beginning, telling our stories; then we thought, perhaps we should make this into a story 'To be continued...' We decided to call our story "Do you remember...?"

Now, do you remember the second class of the School, the class of 2003? We were something like the middle child in a family – everybody liked us, but everybody looked at us through the prism of the first class of the School, which had proven to be quite a success. Things were more difficult for us, since we could not afford any 'errors in development'. Lucky for us, we did not fail. Our training went through the already established four courses – three courses in Bulgaria – in hotel 'Finlandia', Pamporovo – and the fourth in Strasbourg.

The beginning of our training brought us a lot of excitement and many expectations. We had heard some things from the participants of the year before, but everything was new for us, and we had our good and bad, and sometimes scary, experiences. Our group had both politicians and representatives of the so-called "civil society quota".

Well, we had to accept one another, we tried to fit in, and eventually came to like each other. There was more than enough enthusiasm, perhaps as strong as that of the first class, and more than enough skepticism. During the first couple of days, each political party group was trying to get their 'own' people together, and give them special attention. During the debates and work in small groups, everyone voiced their opinion and defended a position, maybe with more fervor than necessary. But that was just the beginning, when none of us were quite sure where they had actually landed. The moderators were a huge help in all of that - Ani, Ventzi, Mitko, Ivan. We managed, somehow, without enough theoretical background (true at least for some of us), to put in practice the slogan "Education is a form of a continuing dialogue, and dialogue is nothing but different points of view!"



The first course, Democracy and Governance, was a very good choice. At that time, more than 5 years ago, that topic was still arousing passions in society. Actually, the topic is timeless and is always important, and we got into a dynamic and interesting debate. We had the pleasure to listen to the engaging presentations of Svetsolav Malinov, John Winant, H. E. Dimitris Kourkoulas, Anelia Dimitrova, Dobrin Kanev, Kiril Valchev, and many others.

Our 2nd course was dedicated to the topic of conflicts, under the motto "Smart people solve conflicts, wise people prevent them." Well, there were absolutely no conflicts among us, just another unforgettable experience in Pamporovo. And, once again, meetings with exciting people, great professionals, and of course, new friends. This second course opened up a new page in my own life and professional career. I was captivated by the lecture of Ms. Sasha Bezuhanova and the theory of management, and found out the many areas in which the theory can be applied, including politics. What a discovery, indeed! Please, excuse this personal digression, however, I cannot but mention the huge impact the rest of the lecturers had on all of us, in particular, the topic of leadership. Many times afterwards, we went back to these topics, for more discussions and analysis. Let me just mention some of our lecturers: Antonii Todorov, Avis Bohlen, Vesselin Metodiev, Aernout van Linden, James Brown, Levon Hampartzoumyan... They were all very interesting, but let me take the liberty of singling out just one: Mr. Aernout van Linden. It was the greatest of pleasures to listen to him discuss matters of etiquette, during dinner. No one can speak about etiquette like he could. His stories and examples were rife with such unforgettable humor, that we did not, even for a second, stop to eat dinner, as proper etiquette requires. We simply laughed our heads off. True, his humor proved a bit too strong for some of the participants, but that was just part of the whole game.

Another such adventure was the Paintball game. Vessela Lecheva was not among us, but we had someone else equally distinguished to replace her: an officer from the General Staff of the Bulgarian Army. He prepared the strategy and tactics of the game, and one phrase was on everyone's lips afterwards: "Let the women be the target." We – the women – suffered the least damage, let that be remembered as well. I'm joking, but that game taught us a lot.



A special guest of the seminar was Ms. Pirita Sorsa, then director of the Mission of the IMF in Bulgaria. She was brave enough to venture the "jump of trust", showing her own trust in our politicians, who rose to the occasion and did not drop the ball!



The third course was not less exciting, despite some mishaps. During the 'game of life', for instance, one of the groups could not reach a decision because they could not come to an agreement. No arguments or negotiations did the trick, and that was just another lesson we learned. The third course was both exciting but also a bit sad, as it marked the end of our training in Bulgaria. Again, we had the pleasure to listen to great lecturers, such as Prof. Jose Ramon Pin from Madrid.

Let me share only two more of my memories, unforgettable as the rest of my experience in this program: the first was a team game, where some of the participants had to jump down from a height of 2m, hoping and praying that those on the ground will catch them. You should have been there to see people from opposing parties jumping down and counting on their 'enemies' not to let them down, literally. No, we did not let anyone fall, in the genuine spirit of the School, which taught us cooperation and tolerance. And the second memory: one of our 'classmates' – a mufti from the town of Aitos, gave everyone a copy of the Khoran, with a translation in Bulgarian. A gesture that speaks volumes and shows that there are no problems without solutions, only different kinds of solutions; a gesture that came to prove, one more time, that the ideas of the School for tolerance and unity will succeed, no matter what.

We also had the privilege to attend the meeting in Sofia of former US Ambassadors to Bulgaria, together with alumni of the Bulgarian School of Politics. The meeting took place in the National Assembly; it was very informative and at the same time, a nostalgic retrospection of the relationships between our two countries.

Last but not least: Strasbourg again. For the second time, it was Klingental, the aroma of Christmas cookies, and French provincial romantics. Meetings in the Council of Europe, discussions with the representatives of other schools; the meeting with the Moldova School of Political Studies stands out - we spoke English with them, mind you. That's the irony of life, I guess, since all of us spoke Russian...

Words are not enough, and I am no master of words anyway. But my class too managed to put together the puzzle and we became officially members of the Alumni club. It was a great honor and privilege for all of us to be part of this wonderful initiative. I hope that we will continue to be together, today and tomorrow, and for the times to come.

See you all at the Christmas party!



Following the lead of Ms. Sorsa, the Mayor of Veliko Tarnovo now knows that to win elections, you need a good team.



## “LAST THURSDAY” DISCUSSION CLUB

### WHY IS THE TOPIC OF PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT NOT ON THE AGENDA OF THE POLITICIANS?

On Thursday, 26 November, we held the regular “Last Thursday” discussion of the Alumni Club of the School of Politics in Sofia. Our main theme was: why is the topic of the environment not on the agenda of the politicians in Bulgaria?

As chair of the discussion, let me first thank my colleagues who ventured the traffic jams on that Thursday evening and honored the topic with their attendance. Our conversation starter was more than provocative: „What are we doing here, talking about ecology when an economic crisis is shaking the world!?” The implications in this rhetorical question were clear enough: in the state of a crisis, the funds for ecology will be the first to go, if companies want to survive. The next argument we heard was that only rich societies can afford the luxury of ‘protecting the environment’, because there the rapid industrial development has ruined wild nature, and more affluent people are seeking comfortable life by returning to nature. People in our country, however, are not ready to listen to concerns about the environment, given the multitude of problems with unemployment, low salaries, social welfare, and bad infrastructure they have to deal with. Politicians, if they care about their career, should speak 90% of the time about the existing problems, here and now, and devote only 10% of their time to new ideas and policies. Acting politicians argued that if they decided to introduce policies for protecting the environment in Bulgaria, they would definitely lose votes in the elections.



In the course of the discussion, we formulated several theses on the reasons why the topic of the environment is missing from the political discourse in Bulgaria.

1. Bulgaria is still a poor country and many other issues are on everybody’s mind;
2. Our economy would not survive if it were forced to follow the European ecological standards;
3. Wild nature in Bulgaria is still well preserved but people do not appreciate enough that fact and are not sensitive to issues related to the environment;
4. Civil society is not strong enough to put pressure on the politicians for the implementation of concrete environmental policies;
5. Bulgarian politicians lack the capacity for strategic long-term planning, a negative consequence of the model of financing of the political parties themselves. Ecological policies require long-term planning and have long-term effects. For the most part, however, politicians are concerned about winning the next elections, and they care little about future-oriented projects. We also heard voices that environmental policies are hard to implement because there is no adequate legislation to support them. The media is also part of the problem as they are not interested in covering topics that ‘do not sell.’

Of course, there are arguments and examples to counter the above statements as well. We mentioned the Petition for saving Rila Mountain, signed by more than 180 000 people, which was submitted to the European Commission; the entire initiative was organized by civil society groups and ecological NGOs. We seem to have forgotten that the democratic changes in Bulgaria actually started with the protests and petitions of organizations concerned with the environment in several Bulgarian cities.

Furthermore, one of the topics that continues to bring young people together, in spontaneous demonstrations

and protests, is the issue of saving the Black Sea coast from excessive construction or the beautiful mountains in the country. Perhaps the only thing we need is a charismatic leader to start speaking on the topic and put it on the agenda of the parties, and make a winning political platform? On the other hand, we struggled with the question whether the creation of a new political party is unavoidable in order to introduce and defend



a new political idea and a new public cause? Which way should we take and what should be our position, as young politicians and civic leaders, dedicated to the future of the country? Are those politicians right who claim that topics such as climate change and protecting the environment will bring them only political negatives? True, if politicians begin to accuse the citizens that they are to blame because they drive old automobiles and pollute the environment, they will lose the votes of their supporters.

*their own children, if, for example, they only gave up their plastic shopping bags.* What if, instead of fueling the fear of unemployment, we – politicians and decision-makers - introduced programs for additional training and qualifications for people working in environmentally polluting businesses? Would a politician really lose votes, if he or she started speaking positively about ecological issues and environmental policies, and what each one of us should do to support them?

The solution may be for the politicians to find the right words with which to address the people and make them *feel good about their contribution to the future of*

For the politicians in Bulgaria, that question remains open.

## Forthcoming Events

1. It is that time again! On December 4, at 8 pm, in Sinatra Piano Bar, we invite you to join us for our annual Christmas party, to remember the good times in 2008 and tune up for new adventures in 2009.
2. Following the tradition, in the midst of the Christmas season, we will start the new cycle of the National training program 2008/09. The first course of the Program will take place 7-11 December, in Velingrad.
3. The next regular meeting of the Board of the BSoP will take place on December 16, 2008. The Board will discuss the annual report of the School and plan the activities for 2009.
4. On December 18, just before we close for a short but well-deserved Christmas break, the Council of the Alumni Club will hold its final meeting for this year. All members of the Club are invited to attend.



92 Patriarh Evtimii, Blvd., Sofia

E-mail: [office@schoolofpolitics.org](mailto:office@schoolofpolitics.org)

[sp@sp-bg.org](mailto:sp@sp-bg.org)

[www.schoolofpolitics.org](http://www.schoolofpolitics.org)

tel.: +359 (02) 9526882