



JOURNEY AT THE HEART OF BULGARIA

Réalisé dans le cadre de CertiLingua

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INTRODUCTION

1600 years ago, Saint Augustine said in one of his sermons that: "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page". Through this quote, the author reminds us that we should discover both foreign countries and foreign cultures in order to communicate with unknown populations. Indeed, their way of life can be utterly different from ours. Understanding the history and the habits of heterogeneous populations is enthralling and above all rewarding. On the one hand, it enables us to improve our knowledge in plenty of domains. This aspect is revealed by the metaphor used by Saint Augustine in his quote: he is comparing travels to books. On the other hand, if we overtake this sentence, travels permit us to better figure out our way of life which is usually a Western lifestyle. After that, you will cogitate a lot about it. It will make you turn things over in your head. Are you living properly? Are you pleased regarding your habits, your relatives, your profession? It can also bring you back the charm of life. We can become more tolerant, more patient. It can thus make us live better. In this way, everyone should have his "book" as big and heavy as possible.

Trying to enlarge my knowledge in the history of Eastern European countries and in order to improve my English language and develop my contact-skills, I decided to participate in an exchange in Bulgaria with a bilingual school (LANGUAGE SCHOOL ACADEMIC LYUDMIL Stoyanov) situated in Blagoevgrad. Indeed, thanks to my parents, I have the chance to travel a lot and I had explored many parts of the world. Seeing many populations and many landscapes have deeply affected me. I know thus the importance of trips and I always yearn for travelling anew. Thanks to my experience, I recommend to everyone to visit unknown areas as more as possible. And I hope that is only the beginning of my book...

I did not hesitate a lot before accepting this exchange. First of all, my partner (Angel Georgiev) came one week in October 2018. Then, it was my turn in May 2019. We flew from Charleroi (located in Belgium) to Sofia (the capital city of Bulgaria), we drove by bus to Blagoevgrad afterwards. I stayed in Bulgaria for one week in the apartment of my partner. The days were separated into two parts. Firstly, during the day time, we usually had activities with all the exchange-participants (the French and Bulgarian students and teachers). Secondly, at the end of the afternoon and during the weekend, we were only with

our partner and his family who also organized activities and, in this way, we also had busy evenings and a busy weekend.

This experience was my first exchange. For the first time, I had been two weeks with a stranger. I had to communicate only in English. I could not cheat. Above all, I wanted him to have a nice stay and vice versa. At first sight, those challenges and responsibilities may be frightening or even repulsive. But, unlike our first sight, it is heartily gratifying and enriching. Angel became rapidly a friend, not only a stranger. This exchange has moved me a lot, positively of course, and I wanted to write about this experience in order to, on the one hand, remember this enthralling and delightful journey, and on the other hand, introduce my trip (and my point of view of this travel as a French student) to people by describing it. I have thus decided to write a report about my experience. To compose my account, I have highlighted the most noteworthy features. Several aspects have indeed intrigued me, as the facility to interact with Bulgarian people, especially with my partner, but also the disparities between their and our way of communication. Furthermore, I have been attracted by Bulgaria and its culture, its history. It was thus really fascinating to visit Bulgarian cities and to compare them to French cities. These elements have particularly drawn my attention. That is the reason that they will constitute the framework of my report.

In this way, I will ask myself, through my account, the following question:

How did communication during my exchange program with Bulgaria make me develop intercultural values while improving my English skills?

First of all, I will start my report with what did I discover in Bulgaria and how I visited this country for one week. Secondly, I will introduce you to my experience in terms of communication with Bulgarian people.

I. STAYING IN BULGARIA

Let us start with a little presentation. Since January 2007, Bulgaria has been one of the twenty-seven members of the European Union. The capital of this country is Sofia that is also the economic and political centers. With about 7 million citizens, Bulgaria is one of the poorest countries in the EU. Bulgarians speak Bulgarian, the only official language, which uses Cyrillic alphabet.

During my exchange, I could discover a country that had always attracted my attention.

1. Cities

- **Sofia: the capital city**

Sofia is the biggest city in Bulgaria with 1.3 million inhabitants. It is also the political, economic, industrial and cultural capital. Thanks to its tourist attractions, this city is yearly visited by plenty of visitors who come from all around the world. My partner and I discovered this wonderful city by ourselves.

We visited Roman ruins which are situated close to the city center. There were vestiges of the ancient Roman city. During the visit and the presentation of these remains, I learned a lot about the origins of this city. Even though Sofia was inhabited by Romans from 29 AD, stains from prehistoric villages were founded. That means that this location was occupied for twenty-five centuries!

One of my best souvenirs is also one of the best tourist attractions in Sofia: Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. This Orthodox cathedral was built 100 years ago in Neo-Byzantine style. I was in front of it and inside it. It is awesome! The external architecture is incredible. The interior style is thriving. Above all, the gold-plated dome struck me thanks to its height and the impression of robustness that it is transmitting. It is really inspiring! This cathedral is one of the well-known symbols of this city.

In general, Bulgarian people are predominantly Orthodox. We can thus clearly distinguish French Catholic Church and Bulgarian Orthodox Church. For the Orthodox, icons are in the center of their religion. These symbols are crucial because it formerly enabled people, who were illiterate or intellectually-low, to easily understand, interpret and appropriate the religion and its messages, its values, through intelligible emblems. Contrary to the Orthodox,

Catholics favor words. Here is a fundamental disparity between these two religions. The importance of icons is conspicuous in Orthodox churches. In the same way, the Orthodox church has to be an icon. That is the reason that there are plenty of decorations and illustrations on church-walls. Indeed, frescos and mosaics are generally recovering almost the entirety of the church-interior-space. Moreover, Catholics agree to the pope a lot of importance. This symbolic character is the representation of God among human-beings whereas Orthodox consider that there are no leaders. However, unlike Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox have always shown their wealth and even sometimes their power.

Additionally, we were in front of the National Assembly's main building which is imposing. Situated at the heart of the capital city, the National Assembly represents the most important political place in the country.

- **Plovdiv: a cultural city**

Plovdiv is well-known for having been the host of the European Capital of Culture 2019, which enables the creation of a municipal organization: "Plovdiv 2019". In the middle of this event, we discovered this city and its history. In this way, I could develop my knowledge of the Bulgarian history by studying many branches as ethnology, architecture or arts (music, theatre).

Firstly, our walk around the Old Town was remarkable. This quarter is located on three of Plovdiv's hills and it contains the Regional Ethnographic Museum. I could gaze at the Bulgarian architecture: the ground is cobbled and the houses have the form of a "truncated pyramid" (the first floor is bigger than the ground floor). The structure of the properties is made from wood, which is really elegant.

Secondly, we visited an ethnological museum. All the objects that we could observe were interesting and authentic and even sometimes intriguing. These items were displayed in the house of an ancient businessman who built it in the 1840s and who loved feasting and hosting people.

Thirdly, we discovered the Plovdiv Roman theatre which is also situated in the Old Town. Unlike the ruins in Sofia, this theatre has been restored in order to be re-employed. Nevertheless, it presents a very faithful representation of the amphitheater as it was usually used by Romans at the beginning of the second century AD. This huge theatre could receive

about 7000 spectators. Moreover, when we walked around the city center, I could observe some musicians playing music in the street with traditional instruments.

- **Blagoevgrad**

This city is located in the south-west of Bulgaria and is fifty minutes away from Sofia by car. About 80 000 people live in this town which is for instance equivalent to Thionville and its suburb, or Troyes. I stayed in the apartment of my partner in Blagoevgrad for one week. In this way, I discovered Bulgaria from this city. Nevertheless, Blagoevgrad is not accurately connected to other cities by common carriers. We had to favor car. Fortunately, thanks to its brand-new motorways, we could easily ride far away from this town (for example, Blagoevgrad-Sofia: 100 km; Blagoevgrad-Thessaloniki: 220 km; Blagoevgrad-Plovdiv: 290 km). From an economical point of view, this city is well-known for its vast national television-studio and national radio-studio. I saw these properties from outside but I did not visit them.

We visited Blagoevgrad, especially the city-center, which is composed of a large cobbled square surrounded by fountains and plenty of sculptures. We walked on the celebrated umbrella-street of this city. Wonderful! Moreover, we visited the *American University in Bulgaria* of Blagoevgrad, an excellent place where we can study many domains such as social sciences, economy, sciences, etc. This establishment also grants importance to sports. The presence of an American university shows that Blagoevgrad is internationally-minded and, thanks to its powerful university-network, it will enable students to have exchange-opportunities (Erasmus) or to switch to other well-known universities. Furthermore, the American University of Blagoevgrad claims to be appealing and seductive in order to attract international students. Finally, when we were visiting this establishment, I could imagine what it is like to study abroad. This university was an admirable instance of the way that people can visit a country while learning a language and I have to admit that it made me want to study overseas.

- **Comparison to France and overview**

Visiting Bulgaria was exciting and stimulating. Indeed, it was one of my first travels in an Eastern country and my very first exchange. I will broach the subject of the exchange and communication in the second part of my account.

In comparison with French cities and the Parisian centralization, Bulgaria has quite a similar situation but at a lower scale. In France, Paris is the largest and the most populous city (around 12 million inhabitants including its suburb), Lyon (around 2 million inhabitants including its suburb) and Marseille (around 1.7 million inhabitants including its suburb) are far from the French leader. In Bulgaria, Sofia is, from a distance, the most populated city (about 1.3 million inhabitants) whereas Plovdiv and Varna do not exceed 350.000 inhabitants individually.

Regarding the country, discovering it was pleasant and even bracing. Indeed, Bulgarian cities are illustrating the situation of this country particularly in terms of development. As a matter of fact, Bulgaria is, with difficulty, trying to become a very developed country while attempting to forget the Soviet Union time. With this in mind, this country is helped by European Union. Seeing this situation through the city is enthralling. We could observe and understand the historical difficulties and the complex passage from the USSR era to the modern era. For instance, the city-center of Sofia is kept and good-looking and some spots are even really modern. Nevertheless, common carriers, as the tram, are run-of-the-mill and sometimes very aged. Bulgarian people are mostly considering that common carriers are unusable. Same situations can be founded in other cities and other areas in Bulgaria, even though it is more striking to see that in a famous and vast city as Sofia. Another example of those oppositions, Bulgaria has contemporary motorways but the train-network is disastrous. It requires four hours and a half to go from Blagoevgrad to Sofia by train whereas it takes only fifty-five minutes by car. Furthermore, Plovdiv's old town is admirable and it was incredibly agreeable to walk around its cobbled streets. However, this part of the city is totally opposed to ancient and outdated buildings which were built during the USSR-era. As a lover of the cold war history, I find this atmosphere fascinating and inspiring. To sum up, enormous contrasts are noticeable in Bulgaria. Even if there are obviously also disparities in France, in Bulgaria the contrasts are more extreme.

We have analyzed the city aspect of Bulgaria and we have related it to the French one. We have noticed that there are some similarities between both countries, as the idea of centralization of powers, but also plenty of disparities, as the level of development of these two countries, which results from two distinct historical contexts. Nevertheless, as well as the city-aspect, we can find a lot of discrepancies in many other domains between Bulgaria

and France. It is the case of school - for that matter – I had the opportunity to be present at courses in high school in Bulgaria.

2. Bulgarian schools and their habits

School in Bulgaria has many common traits with school in France, but also plenty of differences.

- **School in Bulgaria and comparison to France**

I spent two whole days at the bilingual school of my partner (LANGUAGE SCHOOL ACADEMIC LYUDMIL STOYANOV). The first one, which was a Thursday, was separated into two parts. Firstly, in the morning and until lunchtime, we were in class and Bulgarians work as if we were not with them. Secondly, in the middle of the afternoon, we participated to an introduction to the Bulgarian language. The second one was actually not a normal day. Indeed, it was the celebration of the last school day of the senior years before their exam. I will broach this part of the day in the next paragraph. For the moment, let us simply compare school in Bulgaria and school in France, especially high school, through my experience.

About the functioning of this school, this one receives pupils of all ages (from 6 to 18 years old). For my part, I was in an eleventh grade class. In this establishment, a lesson lasts 45 minutes. That is shorter than in France. Furthermore, between two courses, pupils can go out during a break which goes on about 10 minutes. Generally, people play short sports games, in addition to weekly sports lessons. For instance, we can find two little soccer pitches, as well as a sports hall where you can play volleyball or a place where you can practice Ping-Pong. You can also take air and discuss with your friends. For my part and according to my experience, I find this idea very useful. It enables pupils to stay focused only 45 minutes then to relax a bit before returning in class. It allows them to save their vigor and thus to optimize and improve their marks. Moreover, I can quote you another fundamental discrepancy. Indeed, in theory, Bulgarian pupils, as the German one, do not have to change classroom. Contrary to France, the teacher is moving for them.

For my part, I attended four lessons. The first discipline was physics. They had to prepare a report about a well-known scientist and to present it briefly to the rest of the

class. With the aid of a Power-Point presentation, one after another, they talked about a savant. It was gripping but I find that a bit too simplistic sometimes. The second subject was English. There are no fundamental differences compared to the French way to learn English. We could easily participate and interact with the teachers and the other pupils. The third discipline was geography which is utterly differently taught. Indeed, in both countries, when you are young, you are learning how to locate geographic elements and the most prominent of them. In Bulgarian high schools, you are still doing the same thing but with more complex things. With the aid of a giant map displayed on tables, Bulgarian students can intuitively and in a fun way pinpoint area, renowned monuments, etc. In this way, they can form and consolidate strong knowledge and acquire solid geographic land markers whereas in France students are rather examining the world situation in plenty of domains thanks to documents. For both ways to learn geography, we can find the pros and cons. However, the Bulgarian manner may be more useful in the future. The last course was a sports lesson. Indeed, for 45 minutes we practiced volleyball. In Bulgaria, pupils are more independent and more autonomous because, on the one hand, they can decide if they yearn for doing sport or no and, on the other hand, the sports teacher is only there to give them the equipment that they need. He is present only at the beginning and at the end of the lesson. It permits to make students aware of their responsibilities in terms of health while being helpful and convenient. For instance, if you are overwhelmed during an exam period, you can take more time to review your lessons. Nevertheless, unlike in France, they do not have the same assistance.

- **Last week of school for senior years before their exams**

I was very lucky to be in Bulgaria during the last school week of the senior years before their exams. On Friday afternoon (their last day of normal school), the school organized a celebration. Pupils were singing and dancing in front of people (pupils of many ages who do not want to miss this party, teachers, members of the administration). This show also aims to thank the director of the school, teachers and supervisors, etc. During this special day, the senior years were regularly shouting: “one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve” in Bulgarian, which represents all the classes they have achieved. The celebration lasted for the afternoon. Seeing all the school gathered to

congratulate the oldest pupils was quite touching and stirring. I was delighted to participate in this celebration and to observe the way that Bulgarians are achieving their last year. This experience was enthralling.

- **A singularity in Bulgaria: the significance of bilingualism especially at school**

This Franco-Bulgarian exchange was between an ordinary French high school and a bilingual Bulgarian school. This establishment can appear unusual in the view of French people. This type of schools is common in Bulgaria, however, it is reserved, as a priority, for outstanding students. It is an incredible opportunity to learn English for about 20-25 hours per week. Indeed, it allows pupils to acquire almost a second mother tongue thanks to daily practicing. Bilingual schools give a tremendous advantage to these students and impact drastically their language level.

Why is it fundamental for young citizens from small countries such as Bulgarians to have a second well-mastered language? English is a universal language. Speaking it, like natives, will enable these citizens to easily integrate Anglophone curricula in many universities through the world by studying abroad or to enter the English-speaking professional world. Indeed, it permits them to not come down to Bulgarian possibilities in terms of studies or works.

For my part, I find this type very beneficial. In my eyes, bilingual schools offer plenty of interests. As I said higher, it extends their possibilities especially if they desire to study overseas. It is, for that matter, the case of my partner who craves for learning IT in the Netherlands.

We have scrutinized the school habits and the school system in Bulgaria, especially of the bilingual schools. We also have compared it to the French one. We have noticed that there are several discrepancies between the two, such as the high frequency of bilingual schools in Bulgaria. Both systems have indeed pros and cons. I find for instance original the Bulgarian senior year celebration. However, despite the numerous disparities, we could interact through a shared language: English. Indeed, we will henceforth see the way we communicated in English as well as the dissimilarities in terms of communication codes or our introduction to Bulgarian.

II. COMMUNICATING WITH BULGARIANS

1. Communication through a common language: English

Even though we did not speak Bulgarian and they did not talk in French, we could communicate thanks to a helpful language: English.

- **My opportunities to talk in English during my trip**

Within the scope of communication with Bulgarians people who were present at the school or who accompanied us during activities, I talked English with all of them, including my partner, his Bulgarian friends and his teachers. Since everyone was working in a bilingual school, it seemed logical and simpler.

- **Comparison of English level between French and Bulgarian people**

If we have to compare their and our English level to ours, their practice is unhesitatingly and distinctly better. Indeed, in their school, they have from 20 to 25 hours of lessons delivered in English per week, some of which are disciplines which are not straight related to the learning of English, such as scientific subjects. Contrary to them, in my French high school, we only have 4 hours per week performed in English, including exclusively one discipline which is not directly linked to English: biology in English. This radical difference has comprehensive repercussions on the language level because, in addition to their intense timetable which is focused on English, they are always exercising. Yet, practicing is the key to success. They are, throughout the day and during the major part of their scholarship, listening, speaking, reading, writing in English. Above all, they are applying this language to other domains. This aspect is crucial and can be very useful in the future. Indeed, being an expert in a subject that we have always learned in English is actually better. For instance, in the case of research, the most famous documents written by well-known scientists are in English, the most powerful research organizations are anglophone, etc. In general, this universal language is used for an international project. Everyone can with ease imagine that being, for example, an astrophysicist who speaks and who studied in English is more useful than one who exclusively talks in his native language. To sum up, the major part of the Bulgarian students of this bilingual school speak today English as a mother tongue with a

perfect accent whereas, at the end of the French high school, we are tending toward a great and sometimes an excellent English level but seldom better.

- **Is the proportion of Bulgarians who speaks English related to the numerous bilingual schools in the country?**

As far as the proportion of Bulgarian English-speaking people is concerned, more and more young people speak very well, nay perfectly, English. Thus, at 18 years old, they duplicate their number of mother languages. It enables them to simply and efficiently study abroad. However, this high rate of young Bulgarian people, who study English and who probably know it properly, does not mean that almost every Bulgarians speak English.

Indeed, according to my experience, the major part of Bulgarian adults is not able to talk in English. During the exchange, I communicated with many Bulgarian parents (including the ones of my partners and also parents of his friends) and they could not speak English. They had to talk in Bulgarian to their children to tell us something.

My assessment seems to be confirmed by a study, realized by Eurobarometer from 2012. From what the institute says, 25% of the Bulgarian population consider that they can talk accurately in English and 23% in Russian. It shows that even though English is the most spoken language (behind Bulgarian), the figures are not so extraordinary. For instance, Russian is close to English (only 2% less). Another example, in the Netherlands, according to the same research, 90% of the population esteem that they can speak accurately English. It confirms that the rate of English speakers in Bulgaria is not particularly high. The reasons, that explain this moderate level, is the fact that bilingual schools diversified a lot in the country since the USSR collapse (even if this type of school exists since the 50s). Adults, who are more than 40 years old, and elderly people are seldom speaking English whereas young people are usually able to talk in this language. Furthermore, we have to take into account that a significant part of Bulgarians is leaving their native country looking for a higher standard of living in the other European countries (for instance, the brain drain which has resulted from 1991).

- **English Knowledge acquired during this exchange**

My best improves are visible through my oral expression. Indeed, I remarked that I speak more fluently and that my words come more easily and more rapidly. I was also astonished to notice that I developed methods to skirt vocabulary difficulties by trying to replace a word by a short sentence for instance.

2. Another manner of expression: introduction to the Bulgarian language

Bulgarian is a singular language. Even though it uses the Cyrillic alphabet, this language cannot be understood by Russian or Serbian people (despite some words). I was initiated into Bulgarian by essentially two factors. On the one hand, given that I was with Bulgarian people for two weeks (one week in each country), we inevitably taught to each other some words or some sentences in French or in Bulgarian. On the other hand, during the exchange, French students (including me) used to be initiated into the Bulgarian language and the Cyrillic alphabet by teachers for one hour. I will detail the proceedings of this lesson during which we were also between French students.

The lesson was divided into two main part. Firstly, we were introduced to the Cyrillic alphabet. Secondly, we tried to apply by pronouncing some everyday and customary Bulgarian words.

First of all, we had to discover and to feel more confident regarding the new letters of the Cyrillic alphabet. These characters come from many ancient languages including the Greek and the Latin. That is the reason why we can find common letters between Slave language (such as Bulgarian and Russian), Germanic languages (such as English and German) and Romance languages (such as French). Furthermore, there are also some letters which are shared to both alphabets (Cyrillic and Latin) but which have to be pronounced variously. Concerning the common letters, we can quote: A, E, K, M, O, C and T, these ones produce the same sound as in French or in English. About the shared characters that are differently pronounced, we can notice: B [v], H [n], P [r], Y [ou] and X [he]. Finally, there are plenty of letters that look strange for a Western European citizen: Б, Г, Д, Ж, З, И, Й, Л, П, Ф, Ц, Ч, Ш, Щ, Ъ, Ь, Ю and Я.

We can mention that there are more characters in the Cyrillic alphabet. It was worthwhile, fulfilling and enthralling to learn a new alphabet because, in the world, about 350 and 400 million people use it as their first language.

Even though it was quite easy to figure out the functioning, starting to apply it was complex.

Then, we started to formulate short sentences in Bulgarian and I have to admit that it was not so easy and so smooth as the first part. We began with transparent words, such as “restaurant” (ресторант), “coffee” (кафе), before attempting more complicated terms which are everyday used.

3. Different communication codes

- **The sources of disparities in terms of culture and circuitously of communication codes between France and Bulgaria: different historical contexts**

Nowadays, the French and the Bulgarian culture are heterogeneous. Even though they have admittedly likenesses, they are genuinely distinct.

We have to remind previously that the culture and the communication codes are linked. Indeed, if something can seem strange or surprising in the view of one of the two populations, it can be explained by the various interpretations that are given to things. These readings come out from the traditions and thus the history of the country.

It is the reason why the French and the Bulgarian cultures and communication codes are unlike. These discrepancies are due to many factors. In the case of France, the French culture results from its history which has always been related to the French mentality and has repercussions on it. For instance, during the Cold War, France was attached to the Western unit. During this period, the French society was inspired, influenced and affected by the American lifestyle. This example illustrates the fact that plenty of elements give to a population a way of thinking which becomes proper to a country. Thus, French habits, including the manner of communication, are various from country to country. This diversity is noteworthy especially between countries which for the most part had, on the one hand, Eastern inspiration and on the other hand Western inspiration. Indeed, despite its proximity to France (on a global scale), the Bulgarian communication codes are unlike the French ones. As French culture, Bulgarian culture emerges from its history. At the end of the Second

World War, Bulgaria entered in the Soviet sphere of influence and became a “satellite state” of the USSR. This country also rapidly became a “people’s democracy”. This occurrence has consequences. Economically, Bulgaria adopted the economical Soviet style, that is to say, a planned economy. Politically, Bulgaria became heartily and inherently a communist state with a very influential and powerful Communist Party sustained by Moscow. Even though doubts and uncertainties about the functioning and the performance of the social state appeared, the Bulgarian Communist Party dominated this country until 1990 (the collapse of the USSR). Since that, Bulgaria has integrated the European Union. That situation brought Bulgaria closer to the Western world and the Occidental culture. Even if there are also a lot of pros, many people worry about standardization and it can be appealing to examine this phenomenon.

We have seen that the two distinct historical contexts had consequences on the mentality and thus on communications codes which are divergent in both countries. According to my experience, we will henceforth approach the subject of these discrepancies by describing some Bulgarian specific feature in terms of communication.

- **The main discrepancies that I have noticed during the exchange**

The main goal of this part is to notice amusingly some differences between French and Bulgarian communication codes while overtaking prejudices.

- ✚ Yes or no?

Contrary to the usual European way to say yes or no, in Bulgaria, if you want to indicate an agreement, you have to nod your head from left to right and from right to left and vice versa to indicate disagreement. I was surprised to discover this tradition which is unexpected for a European citizen who has always been accustomed to his manner to agree or not.

The manner, I have discovered this tradition, was comical and amusing, even though I did not understand what was wrong. Indeed, I went to a kind of bakery in order to purchase a delicacy for the snack. I selected it; the one was displayed behind a vitrine. I asked him that pastry while I was pointing out it. When he wanted to confirm my choice, I nod my head to say yes (with the European way). Then, he was astonished and he proposed

me the pastry next to the one I wanted. It continues once or twice until he took the one, I wanted. I was startled by this situation because I thought these nods were universal communication codes.

I wanted to know and to understand the origins of this variation which seems to result from a kind of reversal due to a lack of understanding in olden days. That was my hypothesis. I was not so far from the real explanation. As we can imagine and given their proximity to each other, Greek and Bulgarian people were always close to each other. During the Middle Ages, many Greek priests lived in Bulgaria (thanks to some holy location as Rila's mountain). Moreover, in the Greek language "Né" means "yes", yet in the Bulgarian language, "Né" means "no". That is how it inversed the meaning of the signal.

🚩 Do the Bulgarian people "lack" politeness?

In this paragraph, I desired to broach the subject of manners and courtesy. We will obviously not judge their civility. We will just examine the way that they use politeness which is various in comparison to France.

Bulgarians are seldom using words as "excuse me", "please", etc. If it can appear surprising and unusual in France, it is generic in Bulgaria. In general, Bulgarians are straightforward people. Indeed, they prefer not to lose time with unnecessary words. They want to get straight to a point.

Thus, we cannot consider that as a "lack" of politeness but rather as a "shortcut" employed to save time.

For my part, even though I noticed that, in Bulgaria, relations between people are unlike the French ones, I never felt offended. Furthermore, my partner's family was particularly kind, charming and hospitable, especially through meals. In this way, we can suppose that Bulgarians people keep their hospitality and courtesy efforts in order to employ these principles in their familial sphere.

CONCLUSION

Before the journey, I knew that exchanges were worthwhile and rewarding but I did not expect so much. Indeed, it brought me a lot. Firstly, I have indisputably improved my

English practice, especially the fluency, as well as the rapidity of my understanding. Secondly, I visited one of my first Eastern countries by driving around in the biggest cities (Sofia, Plovdiv, Blagoevgrad) and I discovered its language: Bulgarian which uses a so single alphabet. Finally, I have met new friends who, while interacting in English, made me discovered Bulgaria and its specificities. Since I spoke with many Bulgarian people from many ages (youth, parents, teachers, elderly people, etc.), I have developed unique and fundamental intercultural skills while also acquiring knowledge in History and consolidating some of my attributes such as my curiosity, my interest, my engagement, my autonomy and, above all, my sense of responsibility.

Even though this experience was fulfilling and gratifying, in terms of linguistic and cultural supplies, we do never have to stop travelling and discovering unknown and exotic places. On this point, Pierre Bernardo declared: "To travel is to evolve", this sentence is illustrating the fact that, after a trip, you have changed, you have grown up, we are likely to live differently. To generalize, Hans Christian Andersen said: "To travel is to live".

Some experiences can be even better, as studying abroad, doing a gap year to work overseas, etc. My generation will be 18 years old this year, thus, it offers us the opportunity to realize novel and longer experiences in a foreign country.

- **Bibliographie**

- <https://journals.openedition.org/ries/393> - aspect théorique de bilinguisme en Bulgarie (voir page 10).

- https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langues_en_Bulgarie - seulement pour les données du sondage réalisé par Eurobarometer effectué en 2012 (voir page 12).

- **Déclaration sur l'honneur**

Je déclare avoir réalisé mon mémoire sans aide extérieure et n'avoir utilisé que les sources et aides citées dans la partie « bibliographie ».

BLUETTE Benoit



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