

Quiet Dignity

Snapshots of Bulgaria in the Years After It Joined the EU

A PHOTO ESSAY BY SCOTT A. BRINTON

Scott Brinton, a photojournalist who has shot for Herald Community Newspapers and freelanced for The New York Times, served in the U.S. Peace Corps in Bulgaria from 1991-93. He has returned to the Balkan nation nearly a dozen times since.

Bulgaria, a Balkan nation of roughly 7 million people, joined the European Union in January 2007 in the hope of reversing years of fiscal decline following the collapse of the country's communist government 17 years earlier. It was, at the time, the EU's poorest state, and remains so today. This photo essay, of ordinary Bulgarians going about their daily lives with unstated strength, was shot over five two-week periods between the summers of 2007 and 2013, a time of rising wages but continued hardship.



Outdoor market vendors, city of Kyustendil in southern Bulgaria, 2007, the first year of the country's full membership in the European Union. The average Bulgarian earned an annual income of 5,166 leva at the time, or roughly \$200 to \$250 a month, according to Statista. Many older Bulgarians received less than that in their pensions, forcing them to work well into their later years.



A shepherd tending his flock in the village of Rajdavitsa, southern Bulgaria, 2007.



An engineer pops his head out from a Soviet era locomotive as it chugs across the countryside outside Rajdavitsa, 2007.



On a public tram, Sofia, 2009.



A playground in Mladost, Sofia's second-largest residential district, in 2009. Public infrastructure suffered after the fall of communism in 1990.



Inside the Bulgarian National Historical Museum in Sofia in 2010. Bathed in marble, the one-time palace was the main residence of Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria's Communist Party general secretary from 1954 to 1989. The extravagant structure now stands as a symbol of the opulence and corruption of the old party elite.



Stamboliyski Street, central Sofia, 2011.



The Sofia Mall, looking out on Stamboliyski Street, 2013. The average annual Bulgarian income was around 9,300 leva, or \$350 to \$400 a month, at this time, so the trappings of mall shopping remained out of reach for many, if not most, Bulgarians.



ЯДКИ МИКС
50 ГР. - 1,30 ЛВ.
100 ГР. - 2,60 ЛВ.

СУРОВИ ЯДКИ
МИКС
50 ГР. - 1,30 ЛВ.
100 ГР. - 2,60 ЛВ.

СУРОВО КАШУ
50 ГР. - 1,30 ЛВ.
100 ГР. - 2,60 ЛВ.

КАШУ ПЕЧЕНО
50 ГР. - 1,30 ЛВ.
100 ГР. - 2,60 ЛВ.

МИНЕРАЛНА ВОДА
10,60 ЛВ.

Stamboliyski Street,
across from
the mall,
2013.



The outdoor Zhenski Pazar (Women's Market), central Sofia, 2013.



Атака се прецака,
само Болен от
парите е доволен!

Protesters near the office of the president in 2013, decrying government austerity measures that were encouraged by the European Union.

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