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# **The American University in Bulgaria: Institution-building in a developing democracy<sup>1</sup>**

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Roberta P. Laverty*

On September 28, 1991, the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) opened its doors and matriculated 208 first year students as the first private educational institution in Bulgaria since before the Second World War. Because of its affiliation with the University of Maine (UM), it was the only fully accredited university in Eastern Europe. These 208 young Bulgarian men and women moved into a dormitory that had been only recently and reluctantly vacated by socialists. They attended classes taught in English in a building that had been the regional communist party headquarters less than two years before. They had American textbooks and American-style student services.

This article summarizes events that began in mid-1990 and led to the opening of this innovative and unique institution. Our purpose is threefold:

- (1) To establish an account of the planning and early implementation of AUBG and to begin to document the first chapter in this university's history.
- (2) To provide an analysis that focuses on the vision, constituency building, legal structure, organizational dynamics and systems planning and implementation during the initiation of this project.
- (3) To describe the conscious and deliberate efforts of the founders of this institution to establish a model of institution building in a developing democracy.

This analysis addresses several audiences. First, it contributes to the institutional memory for those directly involved in the project. Second, it provides an insight into the policymaking and policy implementation process of the University of Maine (UM) and the University of Maine System (UMS) in the present era of ambiguous mission, leadership transition, and resource constraint. And third, it suggests the contours of a replicable model that has potential as a foreign policy tool for the export of American values, technology, and culture.

## **The vision of the American University in Bulgaria**

When the Bulgarian Communist Party fell in November 1989, Bulgaria began to emerge from over 40 years of governance typified by consistent adherence to Soviet foreign and domestic policy, by massive relocation of the population to promote industrialization, and by one of the most repressive records on human rights in the world. Formerly-secret, pro-democracy societies emerged to become the ruling elite. As they assumed responsibility for running the trains and

fixing the roads and opening the schools, they realized two things. First, they recognized the need to transform basic institutions that had long been dominated by ideological constraint and centralized control. Second, they recognized that reform would be exceedingly difficult because of the entrenched nature of existing institutions. While pragmatism necessitated the attempt at internal reform, another alternative was considered. That alternative was to transplant a western-style organization to Bulgaria that could serve as a model of administrative processes, structures, information technologies, and values. This model would provide a counterpoint to Bulgarian institutions and would challenge them to reform. Within such a laboratory, the successes and failures of a western institution that was transplanted into Bulgarian culture could be observed.

Because the agenda-setters in the new Bulgaria were primarily academics, they were particularly fascinated with the idea of establishing a western-style university. Such an institution would serve not only an educational function within a nation moving toward stable democracy and a market economy, but it would also be an incubator for transformational change. Bulgarians realized that their society was not intellectually equipped to deal with "the changes," that indoctrination and didactic education had too long been mandated, and that critical thinking had been too long forbidden. An American-style education based on intellectual reflection and experiential learning was deemed essential. There was a need to produce quickly a generation of Bulgarians with the ability to respond to rapid change and to operate in the wider world.

### **The University of Maine goes to Bulgaria**

By the fall of 1990, serious discussion was being given to the idea of an American University. The Open Society Fund, an educational and cultural foundation, was then operating major projects in nearly every former Warsaw Pact nation. This foundation, which was supported by George Soros, a Hungarian-American philanthropist, agreed to fund a feasibility study for an American University. In October 1990, the city of Blagoevgrad, a community of over 75,000 in the center of Bulgarian Macedonia, offered to give facilities for a university. The City Council and parliamentary delegation, Bulgarian educational leaders, U.S. Embassy officials, and representatives of the Open Society Fund all visited the site.

During that period, UM became peripherally involved in this Bulgarian venture because of the association among three Americans: John Menzies, William Higdon, and Dale Lick. Menzies, a career foreign service officer at the American Embassy in Sophia, had gained the admiration and trust of influential members of the CDC, the democratic coalition that overthrew the communist regime. John Menzies advised the Open Society Fund to contract with William Higdon to do a feasibility study for the project. Higdon was a former President of Graceland College, a small college in Lamoni, Iowa affiliated with the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints. In November, Dale Lick, President of UM, as part of a trip to the former Soviet Union, traveled to Bulgaria. Lick visited Sophia University and solidified UM's exchange relationship with that institution. He also visited Blagoevgrad and met both with U.S. Embassy officials and with Bulgarians to acquaint himself with the proposed university project.

In January 1991, Bulgarian President Zhelev formally established an Initiatives Committee that was charged with facilitating the creation of an American University. This committee, comprised of noted academics and members of the Grand National Assembly, turned to Higdon's feasibility

study and concluded: (1) that the creation of an American-style university was feasible and represented an opportunity for the U.S. in the emerging Balkan democracies; but (2) that a small academic institution such as Graceland College would not have the resources, visibility, or credibility to pull the project off. The Committee then considered two options: to seek a consortium of U.S. universities to generate the necessary resources and credibility, or to seek one U.S. institution to do the same. Negotiating a consortium would have taken time and the present paradigm of "unfreezing" in Bulgaria necessitated immediate action. The Committee wanted the new university operating by the beginning of the next academic year, a mere nine months away. Thus, they chose the course of seeking one U.S. institution.

The Committee approached Dale Lick, who was already acquainted with the concept. Lick, in consultation with the UMS Chancellor's office, committed UM to tentative involvement. In January, George Prohasky, Executive Director of the Open Society Fund in Sophia, and William Higdon visited Orono. As a result of that visit, Ed Laverty, Executive Assistant to the President, was named by Lick to head a UM planning team. This group also included John Hitt, Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), Marisue Pickering, Associate VPAA, Charles Rauch, Director of Budget and Finance, and James Sherburne, Director of the Office for International Programs.

In April 1991, the team met in Blagoevgrad and Sophia with numerous supporters of the university project and developed an implementation plan, which was to become the basic planning document of the new university. The plan's primary author and contact person was Laverty, whom Lick appointed Acting President of AUBG in early June.<sup>2</sup>

The plan sets goals and processes for the development of AUBG, including governance, students, curricula, academic support services, faculty, facilities, and budget. A partnership between UM and the people of Bulgaria was to create a university with curriculum and pedagogy based "on a multicultural, interactive, collaborative and experiential approach to learning" in a participative educational community.

In May 1991, Laverty returned to Bulgaria to gain Initiatives Committee approval of the Implementation Plan and to consult with the Committee on appointments to the AUBG Board. The Committee not only endorsed the plan but also was prepared to nominate a slate of Bulgarian board members. Also during this trip, Menzies suggested people whom UM might appoint to the AUBG Board. This board was to balance representation between Americans and Bulgarians; eleven members were to be American and ten members Bulgarian. UM would have the right to appoint to consult with the Initiatives Committee on the joint appointment of the four remaining American positions. Most of the Americans whom Menzies suggested, and whom UM eventually appointed, had distinguished reputations and recognition in both Bulgaria and the United States. This "blue ribbon" board, although it brought legitimacy to AUBG, did not generally bring expertise in board governance, fundraising and academic policymaking or affinity for UM.<sup>3</sup>

Also during May 1991, a Memorandum of Understanding was drafted by UMS attorneys. This Memorandum established four contingencies for UM's participation: (1) receipt by AUBG of recognized legal status as a private institution of higher education pursuant to Bulgarian law; (2)

insurance that the facilities promised by the city of Blagoevgrad were adequate and legally guaranteed; (3) assurance of adequate operating funds for the first year; and (4) assurance of continuing funding.

The Memorandum recognizes AUBG as a free-standing private institution of higher education, incorporated in both the State of Maine and in the Republic of Bulgaria, with an independent Board of Directors. UM agreed to extend academic accreditation and to use its best efforts to develop AUBG. UM's responsibilities during the development of the project included recruitment of faculty and staff, design of curriculum, administrative support, recruitment of students, and design of academic policies. During the period that UM extends its accreditation to AUBG, UM is guaranteed continuing oversight through the appointment of the AUBG president and members of the AUBG board. AUBG must also obtain the prior approval of UM's Vice President for Academic Affairs for faculty and administrative appointments, student recruitment materials, the annual budget and curriculum. The Memorandum rests on the assumption that UM will consult with and assist AUBG in becoming independently accredited.<sup>4</sup>

On June 26, 1991, the UMS Board of Trustees, with one dissenting vote, approved UM participation in the development of AUBG. The project's benefits to UM were to be several: promotion of UM's missions of internationalism and multiculturalism; identification of UM as a leader in the field of international education; provision of a focus for student and faculty exchange; and provision of a platform for UM in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that would bring economic and cultural advantages to the State of Maine. A basic condition of the UMS Board approval, however, was that no UM funds be expended.

### **Implementation (or, How to simultaneously invent, assemble, and ride a bicycle with missing parts in the middle of a Nor'easter)**

Implementation began on-site on July 2, 1991 with the arrival of Acting President Ed Laverty.<sup>5</sup> The dozens of offices and classrooms in the main headquarters of the new university were almost totally inhabited by tenants who considered it the people's building. The four rooms reserved for AUBG contained almost no furniture, no paper, no pencils, no copier, and a primitive computer that no one could operate. Little infrastructure for institution-building existed. Office supplies such as staplers, filing cabinets, electrical extension cords and white-out were unavailable or in scarce supply. Telephone communication even with Sophia was tenuous and faxes were totally undependable. The banking system was primitive; a \$41,000 check, an emergency loan from UM, could not be cashed. Systems of filing, record keeping, and correspondence, normally accepted at American universities, were unheard of. For nearly the entire month of July and into August, AUBG received no foreign mail. Then one day weeks of delayed correspondence arrived. Telephone communication with the United States was difficult and involved long waits for calls to go through and then very poor and often fading connections. Radio signals from the BBC were faint and like telephone calls often fading; Voice of America, which had recently begun broadcasting in Sophia, had too weak a signal to be received during the day.

Many of the promises of the City of Blagoevgrad simply could not be met. Not only were all of the proffered facilities at least partially occupied, but also the maintenance and heat of these buildings were far down the list of municipal priorities. For a week during July 1991, the public

water supply of the entire city, polluted due to inadequate purification systems, was shut off. Drinking water, the city hospital, public transportation, and a myriad of other municipal services were woefully under-funded and at the point of collapse. New windows and even heat for an American University could not compete with these necessities.

The first order of business was to fulfill the four contingencies to UM participation that were specified in the Memorandum of Understanding:

***(1) Receipt of recognized legal status as a private institution of higher education pursuant to Bulgarian laws.*** This was problematic for several reasons. No other private educational institutions existed because the constitution had prohibited such schools for over 40 years. Conscription was also an issue, as it raised the question of whether young men attending a private institution should be exempted from universal conscription, as were their counterparts at state-run universities and technical colleges. Technically, no legislature existed that could pass such a law. A Grand National Assembly was sitting with the primary charge of drafting a new constitution, but a working legislature would not be in place until the late fall. Yet this legislation was needed before the matriculation of students at the end of September. The legislation was passed in mid-September but only after intensive lobbying to convince the reluctant (and at times, downright hostile) socialists who controlled the Grand National Assembly. President Zhelev called upon the Assembly to suspend the rules and act favorably on the legal recognition of AUBG as a definitive and positive statement about the direction of the new Bulgaria.

***(2) Ensuring that the facilities promised by the City of Blagoevgrad were adequate and legally guaranteed.*** This again was complicated by several factors. The city had enthusiastically offered three buildings to the proposed university. An in-city, seven-story office building included shops, restaurants, a 1,000-seat auditorium, offices and classrooms. Two other buildings were located a few kilometers outside the city. A 200-bed dormitory had dining facilities, several classrooms, and a 200-seat auditorium. A residence contained eight apartments and elaborate first-floor dining and conference facilities. All three had been confiscated from the Communist Party. At first glance all three looked impressive, with their marble construction and "socialist massive" architecture, but none had been maintained since November 1989. Broken plumbing, cracked windows, and the smell of urine pervaded.

All three were in various stages of occupancy. The residence, which had been one of many residences of the former dictator Todor Zhivkov, had been vacated by the former staff the day before the first Americans arrived. It took weeks to get keys to all of the rooms, which was finally accomplished only at the intercession of the mayor. The former manager of the building did often telephone to demand return of items, (*e.g.* couches, carpets, or glassware) and would occasionally even enter the building with the intention of retrieving some item, but there was never any serious contention over this building. It had been transformed from quite literally an armed fortress built by impressed labor gangs into a public place, where Bulgarians could (and often did) wander in, just to look, or to talk, or to feel the satisfaction of being in a formerly forbidden, secret place.

The dormitory was another matter. The city had halted seizure of the building, and it was not legally free as were the other two properties. It had been abandoned as a party training center and

was being defensively occupied by "communist firms," who, in legal fact, had every right to be there. The facility was in bad repair and needed not only cosmetic work but also a new water supply and new plumbing and heating plants. If these renovations were to be accomplished to make it habitable, the Bulgarian Socialist Party had to be convinced to give up the building. Again, after intensive lobbying of both national and regional party officials, their decision was to give up the building, to get in on the ground floor as being friends of this new university, and to avoid seeming obstructionist. By the beginning of August, renovation began and contractors worked around the clock to finish by September 28.

The third building, the seven-story complex, was also occupied. The most visible tenant was a pedagogical institute which, although it had a campus in the city, had moved in to ease "temporary" overcrowding. This institute was occupying over half of the building. They had documents from the City Council legitimizing their claim, and they had no intention of leaving. Practically every remaining room was occupied by some firm or club. One entire floor was filled with archives of the regional communist party. During the first year of operation, AUBG compromised and diplomatically, yet firmly, insisted that the pedagogical institute pull back to one floor. Over a period of months, firms and most other tenants moved out.

Along with physically occupying the facility, legal transfer was a necessary contingency not only for UM participation but also for U.S. government funding. In a legal environment in which there had been no precedent for, or concept of, private property for over 40 years, this took a "re-making of the wheel" effort involving formal negotiations and the signing of documents with the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers, the Minister of Finance, the Blagoevgrad City Council and the Mayor.

**(3) Assurance of adequate funding.** Part of the understanding with the UMS Board of Trustees, and a specific concern of Chancellor Woodbury, was that funding be generated from three sources: the U.S. government, the Bulgarian government, and private donors. UM would not in any manner finance the project. In fact, it would bill AUBG for any costs incurred.

John Menzies was very effective in initiating the process to receive \$750,000 immediate bridge funding from the United States Information Agency (USIA). This AUBG request for funding was problematic for several reasons. First, any funding agency would be skeptical of such an ambitious project with no proven record of financial planning and management. Second, Menzies lobbied executive staff and got commitments directly from them, which upset the budgets of program people, and in the process, did not endear AUBG to them. Third, because of the time imperative of the AUBG start-up, this request was out of the normal budget cycle. It took special authorization from Congress to secure the funds. Fourth, the \$750,000 did not give AUBG discretionary funds. Funding was all dedicated for specific expenditures, such as textbooks and curriculum development. And, fifth, although the funds were authorized in August, it took the efforts of both UM's Director of Finance and Budget and AUBG's President to move them out of the bureaucratic backwater and finally, in October, onto the AUBG books.

Private funding came almost exclusively from the Open Society Fund and was the mainstay during those summer months. Both private fundraising and shepherding the USIA funding were to be handled in the United States by James Sherburne at UM and William Higdon, who had

been appointed AUBG's Vice President for Academic Affairs. These efforts were unsuccessful. AUBG did not begin to organize an effective development effort, outside of the AUBG President's office, until January 1992. UM committed assistance with AUBG fundraising, even though it was not a specific responsibility under the Memorandum of Understanding, because this project was seen as an opportunity to acquire funding for UM. Grant proposals were to be developed to fund UM's administrative overhead, and the inevitable interest generated by this project was to draw attention to (and raise funds for) UM's international programs.

Funding from the Bulgarian government was a delicate matter. It was politically impossible for funds to be allocated through the legislative process to support a new American institution. Bulgarian institutions of higher education were begging for funds. Many were closing their doors and all had facilities in need of repair. Bulgarian faculty members at these institutions earned about 2,000 leva per month, the equivalent of approximately \$100. Bulgaria had no extra funds for higher education (or for much else). However, a large sum of foreign aid was available from the Food for Progress program. Bulgaria had received shipments of corn from that program to sell. It could then distribute the proceeds to development projects. President Zhelev, the new democratic president of Bulgaria, supported transfer of 50.1 million leva (approximately \$2.5 million) of the Food for Progress funds to AUBG.

**(4) Assurance of continuing funding.** Administrators at USAID and USIA were understandably guarded. The new project was competing with several other on-going training efforts in Bulgaria, including a public administration training program coordinated by the University of South Carolina and an intensive English institute and economic instruction program conducted by the University of Delaware. However, AUBG had "friends in high places." By virtue of its partnership with UM, AUBG enjoyed the special attention of the Senate Majority Leader, George Mitchell. In a symbolic gesture, AUBG was cited in the preamble of the Foreign Assistance Act as a model example of post-Cold War assistance. Commitment of continuing U.S. government funding did not come until April of 1992, when Laverty convinced Bulgarian Prime Minister Dimitrov to include funding for AUBG in his talking points at a meeting with Under-secretary of State Eagleburger. That resulted in a pledge of \$1 million for the next fiscal year. Dr. Ronald Roskins, Administrator of USIA, conducted a site visit at AUBG in June 1992 and met with AUBG Board Chair Sol Polansky and Laverty in Washington in July. Subsequently, Roskins pledged on-going financial assistance for the next four years, contingent on AUBG efforts to build an endowment and on Board reorganization to assure fundraising.

Also, by the time classes commenced, a larger allotment of Food for Progress funding was being sought from the next shipment of corn. This funding had the full support of President Zhelev, who stated that AUBG deserved the funds because it was the only thing in Bulgaria that worked. His only contingency was a letter from the U.S. Embassy stating that the Embassy did not object to AUBG's receipt of Food for Progress funds.

Long-term funding from Soros' Open Society Fund seemed fairly certain. Not only had this foundation extended facilities and staff to AUBG, it had also responded positively to requests for funding. Negotiations had begun to solidify cooperative ventures with Soros' "pet project," the Central European University in Budapest, as well as to establish twenty AUBG scholarships to be funded and administered through Open Society Funds in Eastern and Central European



nations. Two other potential long-term funding sources were the Pew Charitable Trust, which had expressed interest in coordinating AUBG's foundation fundraising, and the International Media Fund, which was favorably considering an intent to plan submitted by the University of Missouri for the development of AUBG's journalism curriculum.<sup>6</sup>

All of the other work required to design a university progressed simultaneously in Orono and in Blagoevgrad. This process was typified by the rapid chronology of events, by nearly impossible communications between the two sites, and by fragmentation on the Orono campus. Orono faculty committees recruited twelve AUBG faculty members (none from UM) via an ad in The Chronicle of Higher Education in late July. These twelve arrived in Blagoevgrad by the middle of September.

These UM faculty committees selected textbooks and designed a first year curriculum: English Rhetoric and Composition, Calculus, World History, Introduction to Anthropology, Introduction to Economics, and Introduction to Politics. Three courses, Introduction to Music, Introduction to Sociology, and Statistics, were added in Blagoevgrad.

Because of time constraints, recruitment of staff did not conform to normally accepted procedure. The imperative was time; open, orderly, and competitive recruitment and selection of staff was sacrificed. The AUBG President, its Vice President for Academic Affairs, a Director of Finance, and a Director of Administration were recruited by the UM administration. Directors of Student Living, Facilities, Telecommunications, Food Services, Student Affairs, and a Dean of Faculty, some Bulgarian, some American, were recruited from Blagoevgrad. Other than the obvious cost of violating progressive, accepted practices of human resource management, this process resulted in two other significant costs. First, not one of the AUBG administrative staff, with the exception of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, had ever held a similar position of authority and responsibility in an American setting. Second, these administrators, because of the very nature of the selection process, had very little mandate on the Orono campus, which inevitably had a negative impact on the project.

In Blagoevgrad, over 100 Bulgarian support staff were interviewed and hired. Because of the city's inability to maintain the facilities, AUBG was forced to hire many more employees than was anticipated. Standards of equal employment opportunity were attempted and application forms, public notice, and job criteria were established. But due to the imperative of time, these procedures were often violated.

Student recruitment and testing progressed in Blagoevgrad. Although Bulgarians were clearly in favor of an American university, student recruitment was a "black box." Would students actually commit to attending this experimental university, which was so different and unorthodox? Would students have the English language skills to read American textbooks, to discuss in class, and to write? On July 5, a press conference was held to announce the project and to explain the details of entrance requirements, tuition, financial aid, and curriculum. National media and busloads of young people from all over Bulgaria arrived. The audience filled the 1,000-seat auditorium and stayed for over two hours eagerly asking questions. This phenomenal show of interest, which was to be repeated over and over again during the coming weeks and months, led to over 800 applications for admission within the next few weeks. From those applications, 475

of the most highly qualified applicants (based on secondary school grades) were given appointments to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and to produce a writing sample. These tests were administered, graded, and evaluated on-site. Technical equipment was borrowed from the Blagoevgrad radio station; rooms with enough desks and lighting were offered by the pedagogical institute; proctors who could read directions and answer questions in English were found. On the appointed days, students who had never seen standardized, machine-produced tests before (and who had no idea what a No. 2 pencil is), put themselves to the challenge. The mean combined SAT scores of the 208 accepted students was 1103 and the mean TOEFL was 606. (That year, UM's entering class had mean combined SAT scores of 980.)

As the summer progressed, supplies were procured. The budget was revised to reflect the added costs of heating and maintaining facilities. An academic calendar and a class schedule were established. Faculty offices and classrooms were furnished. Textbooks were ordered. Faculty housing was found. Financial aid and work-study were implemented. A health center began to operate. Student and faculty orientations were planned and conducted. Buses were contracted. Weekly press briefings were scheduled. Food was purchased. Conferences were held. And dialogue was established with Blagoevgrad academics and educators, artists and musicians, broadcast and print media, and politicians. By September 28, AUBG was a reality.

The vision set forth by the Initiatives Committee was being operationalized. AUBG provided an alternative educational program for training educators, economists, public administrators, computer scientists, and journalists to meet Bulgaria's professional needs in building a modern society. AUBG provided not only alternative training but also an alternative paradigm of knowledge that is based on creative and critical thinking. Knowledge transfer would be fostered through the establishment of a university library and a telecommunications network that would link UM with not only AUBG but also with a consortium of Bulgarian educational institutions.<sup>7</sup>

AUBG also provided an alter-native organization - a role model of western processes, such as budget cycles, human resource management, intra-organizational communications, and office management. And its flat, open, participative structure and team-oriented approach to work was revolutionary to Bulgarians accustomed to hierarchical, closed, rigid bureaucracies.

AUBG was poised to become not only a catalyst for educational and institutional reform, but also for community development. A program of conferences and institutes had already begun.<sup>8</sup> An Intensive English Institute was in the planning stages and would be implemented by the beginning of 1992. Discussions had commenced with local business and political leaders about AUBG providing technical assistance in the establishment of a business center. Local artists, musicians, and the Blagoevgrad theatrical community, which consisted of an opera company, a repertory theater, and a puppet theater, had expressed interest in collaborating with the new university.

There was also great hope on the part of many Bulgarians, President Zhelev included, that AUBG would become, in his words, a "beacon on the region" and foster dialogue among Balkan universities and thus inevitably add to peace and stability in the region. To respond to this

mandate, AUBG had begun to establish ties with several institutions in Romania, Turkey, Macedonia, and Greece. These were to lead to protocols and exchanges during the next year.

Another spillover effect of this American presence was the inevitable fact that Bulgarians began to see Americans in a realistic light, rather than as the uni-dimensional stereotypes presented either by the old regime or, more recently, by the import of American pop culture. Part of the strength of an academic community is its pluralism. When Bulgarians looked at this community of Americans, they saw liberals and conservatives, nice people and not-so-nice people, vegetarians, church-goers, golfers, joggers, smart people, skinny people and fat people, old people and young people. As Americans showed themselves, warts and all, it established realistic dialogue and expectations. Americans showed their diversity, but they also showed a binding civic culture that unites even the most disparate personalities in problem solving and work. Typically, the Americans resident in Blagoevgrad began an active campaign of volunteerism. They soon were organizing everything from marathons to fundraisers to recycling efforts to social service reform groups.

## **Conclusions**

AUBG is a Bulgarian institution. It was conceived by Bulgarians. Its governing board is half Bulgarian. It was financed exclusively during the planning stages and to a great extent during the early stages of implementation by a Bulgarian foundation and the Bulgarian government. Most important, it is entrusted with the education of hundreds of the best and the brightest of Bulgaria's youth.

- The vision of the institution is to create a transformational organization that would foster knowledge transfer and institutional innovation in the building of a post-totalitarian society. It seeks to provide a dialectic to the rigid, technical, information-poor education of the past. Its vision is based on the concepts of intellectual, economic, cultural, and organizational empowerment.
- The AUBG project is a complex one. Building a new institution is always a complicated venture. But AUBG was built in less than 100 days in a bi-cultural setting, with severe restrictions on supplies and communication, with multiple and often conflicting constituencies, in a society typified by economic, political and cultural upheaval.
- The University of Maine became involved in AUBG as a result of executive leadership networking rather than as a result of consensus-oriented planning. It was perceived as a personalized, favorite project of President Lick, who left the campus the very day implementation started.
- The University of Maine, during the early stages of implementation, did not have the institutional leadership or resources to fulfill its responsibilities. Some tasks, such as faculty recruitment and curriculum development, were accomplished; others, such as student recruitment, administrative support, and fund-raising, were never effectively organized. To this day, AUBG continues to have no "institutional home" at UM. There is no focal point of authority and responsibility for all of the various tasks associated with this project. This results not only in

inefficiencies and general intra-organizational confusion about who is responsible for what, but it also creates a lack of accountability.

- The University of Maine, even though unable to provide comprehensive support, has on an *ad hoc* basis dedicated much time and institutional resources to AUBG. The Board of Trustees requirement that UM expend no funds can be realized within a line-item budget but participation in this project has inevitably consumed time and attention of administrators, staff, and faculty. This is a real cost, whether it has a budget-line or not.
- AUBG, during the early stages of implementation, was severely lacking in time, funding, physical resources, human resources, and Board of Trustees and UM support. But it was rich in Bulgarian popular and political support and in American energy and ingenuity.
- AUBG provides a model for foreign assistance which deserves serious consideration. It makes economic sense. A market for this information age product exists. There is world-wide demand for American higher education and many consumers have the requisite English language competency to consume an exported American education. Likewise, American academics and administrators with the tradition of delivering a quality product are in abundant supply.

Export of American higher educational institutions provides a relatively inexpensive, decentralized method of dispensing foreign aid. It has the potential to produce hundreds of college graduates all over the developing world with an understanding of, and affinity for, the United States. Projects of this type mitigate the brain-drain in these nations and build a self-perpetuating vehicle for the building and stabilizing of infrastructure and civic culture.

- AUBG represents an internationalization of the land-grant philosophy. It is an institution dedicated to academic excellence. It is a center for knowledge creation and dissemination and an incubator for applied research. It is dedicated to public service.

### **...And the challenge for the University of Maine**

The great irony of UM's involvement in the AUBG project is that UM itself is an institution that has been attempting organizational transformation for years. People of the State of Maine as well as members of the university community have yearned for transformations in the institution's standards, morale and resource allocation. Numerous special committees and reorganizations have attempted to effect those goals. But the structures, processes and ideology that have incrementally grown over the past quarter century are still very much in place. There are many lessons to be learned from the vision of the Bulgarian Initiatives Committee and its blueprint for transforming didactic, information-poor, hierarchical systems. If one does not approach the AUBG project with this vision, then one misses the point and the opportunity.

The challenge is clear. As a start in fulfilling its commitment to the Bulgarian people, as well as in realizing the benefits of this opportunity, UM should:

- Give AUBG an "institutional home" and budget line. The project needs coordination and direction; it needs to be planned, monitored, and evaluated. The project needs a research

capability to guide policy decisions, and it needs coordinated public relations efforts. UM needs to provide technical support in purchasing, shipping and transportation and to organize and coordinate technical assistance to move AUBG toward accreditation.

- Communicate the infectious vision of AUBG to a wide constituency and capitalize on UM's role as a partner in the development of a post-Cold War model for the export of democracy.
- Assert legally mandated control over the fledgling AUBG board, and take responsibility for the open recruitment and selection of AUBG executive leadership.
- Ensure that not only does AUBG become an independently accredited institution, but that it reflect the land-grant tradition at its best.

The greatest benefit of internationalism and multiculturalism is not student, faculty and administrative travel, nor is it in being statistically correct in national rating schemes. The greatest benefit of widening our horizons, is that, by looking deeply and with empathy at other cultures, we ultimately know more about ourselves.

UM has been given an extra-ordinary opportunity, which literally fell into its lap, to participate actively in one of the pivotal dramas of the latter twentieth century - the building of post-totalitarian societies. But ambivalent commitment, lack of leadership, resource constraints, and organizational dynamics have prevented UM from fully capitalizing on this opportunity. It is time for Maine and its university to look inward, to confront our values, to take out our Yankee ingenuity, and to fish or cut bait.

### **Endnotes:**

1. When the authors left Bulgaria in August 1992, AUBG executive staff seized the contents of their offices. Books, teaching materials, files, research materials, and personal items have not been returned. Much primary documentation has been lost and this article must rest on anecdotal information and unattributed sources.
2. The other four members of the visiting team played various roles in the project. Hitt became UM's Acting President on July 1, 1991 and attended the first AUBG Board meeting in Blagoevgrad in November, 1991. Pickering coordinated the recruitment of AUBG faculty and the development of curriculum. Sherburne took responsibility for logistical support and fundraising. However, lack of a clear mandate, lack of resources, and the numerous other competing interests of the Office for International Programs led to the failure of this arrangement. Rauch and his administrative assistant Sue Goodie evolved, by default, as AUBG's logistical support at Orono, arranging for shipment of supplies, transportation of faculty and staff, as well as the provision of technical assistance with financial matters.
3. A notable exception was the appointment of Harrison Richardson, former member of the UMS Board, who not only took his responsibilities as a working board member seriously but who also brought an understanding of academic policymaking, board governance, and an affinity for UM.

4. UM was not the only university establishing legal structures for this project. An ASHA (American Schools and Hospitals Abroad) administrator, Nan Frederick was working with attorneys in both Colorado and Delaware to incorporate AUBG in those states and was actively recruiting staff and board members. Frederick was in Bulgaria during Laverty's May trip attempting to solidify this work and gain Initiatives Committee approval of a partnership with the University of Delaware. In August 1991, Frederick was appointed to the AUBG Board by Chancellor Woodbury.

5. By the commencement of classes, five other Americans recruited in Orono had arrived. The Directors of Finance and Health Services arrived in late September; the Director of Administration arrived in late August; the Executive Assistant to the President and the Director of Facilities arrived in late July. The travel arrangements for several of these staff members were delayed in Orono. In fact, the Director of Administration finally arranged and paid for his own travel in August.

6. At present, initial hopes for well-rounded funding have not been realized, with USAID being the only significant funding source. The University of Missouri was successful in its proposal for journalism curriculum development. Pew Charitable Trusts has granted \$150,000 for economics curriculum development. (Pew has recently awarded over \$2.5 million to a variety of American and Eastern European universities for the development of programs for the region; neither AUBG nor UM received any of these funds.)

As for continuing funding under the Food for Progress program, the U.S. Embassy, although it promised a letter approving transfer of funds in early 1992, did not send the letter for months, long after the funds had been allocated elsewhere. Direct request for Bulgarian government funding has predictably failed.

Board fundraising has been ad hoc and insignificant. And although George Soros is honoring his commitment to provide 20 scholarships, he withdrew his active support by the end of 1992. (Soros recently made the largest individual donation ever given to a private educational institution - over \$230 million to the Central European University in Budapest. He also continues to fund many other educational initiatives in the region including the development of libraries.)

7. Both of these projects - building an AUBG library and establishing a telecommunications link - received high priority commitment from the AUBG board during its first meetings; neither have been implemented. At the commencement of its third year, AUBG has a library of 4,000 volumes. The telecommunications link received not only Board endorsement but also a commitment to fundraising in February 1992. UMS consultants were hired by AUBG to design and implement such a system. Their work in mid-1992 led them to conclude that the link could be on-line "in a matter of weeks".

8. By the commencement of classes, AUBG co-sponsored, with the Bulgarian National Bank and the World Bank, three week-long seminars for Bulgarian bankers. Also, a conference for the discussion of free press issues was scheduled for October 1991 and would be attended by journalists from throughout Eastern Europe.

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