

## Bulgarian Libraries: Before and After 1989

By Evelyn Weliver

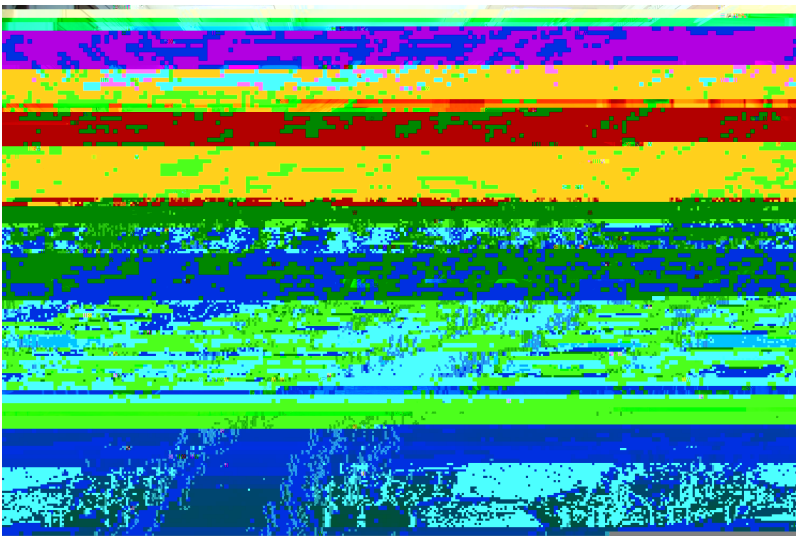
In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down leading the way for democratic changes throughout Eastern Europe. Twenty years later in Bulgaria the government and leadership are evolving and libraries are struggling to get support, computers, databases, and space.

In May 2010, I visited several libraries in Bulgaria to learn what they experienced during the Communist rule after World War II and what the situation is today. I interviewed Aneta Doncheva, Deputy Director of the National Library and Vanya Grashkina, President of the Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA). They clearly appreciate the partnerships that Bulgarian librarians and American Library Association members have formed.

*Interview with Aneta Doncheva, Deputy Director of the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, Sofia, Bulgaria*

**EW (Evelyn Weliver): How are libraries different now from the way they were before 1989?**

**AD (Aneta Doncheva):** Before 1989 there was a clear hierarchy under the Ministry of Culture and the major function of libraries was to educate about the ideologies of Communism. It was not important how much information or how many people received information because the information was controlled. Certain books weren't given to the people. The selection



of books was controlled. Yes, there was public access to the library, but the library could refuse to give you a book. Now the purpose of libraries is to inform, educate and provide free access to books and databases.

**EW: How would the government know what you bought?**

**AD:** The book orders went through the state and a special budget for purchasing books. Then the books were sent to the library. A special report was made to the state. We were forbidden to buy many foreign books, but libraries got some foreign books by exchanging books from their libraries for books of the same value with foreign libraries.

**EW: Have you received help from other libraries since 1989?**

**AD:** After 1989 there has been much

helpful cooperation with American libraries and the American Library Association (ALA). They have contributed to our way of thinking and ways of problem solving. This has been a very difficult adjustment. They have helped people have a higher esteem for doing the work of librarians and for their position in society.

Doncheva was referring to the ABLE project (American-Bulgarian Library Exchange) that was formed

## Message from the Editor

This issue starts with an interesting article from Evelyn Weliver, who writes about the differences in Bulgarian libraries between 1989 and now. It's great to see how much the libraries there have developed, in large part due to the efforts of partnerships. Proof that an international partnership can have long-term effects!

The other article comes from Dr. Amany Zakaria El-Ramady, a faculty member at the Library and Information Science Department of the University of Egypt in Alexandria. Dr. El-Ramady writes about the work done by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to support the development of civil society in Egypt during the revolution earlier this year. It is wonderful to see a library at the center of this type of public discussion.

It is June yet again, which means ALA Annual is just around the corner! For those making last-minute plans, the schedule of IRRT and IRC events is on page 8. I wish all attendees a successful conference!

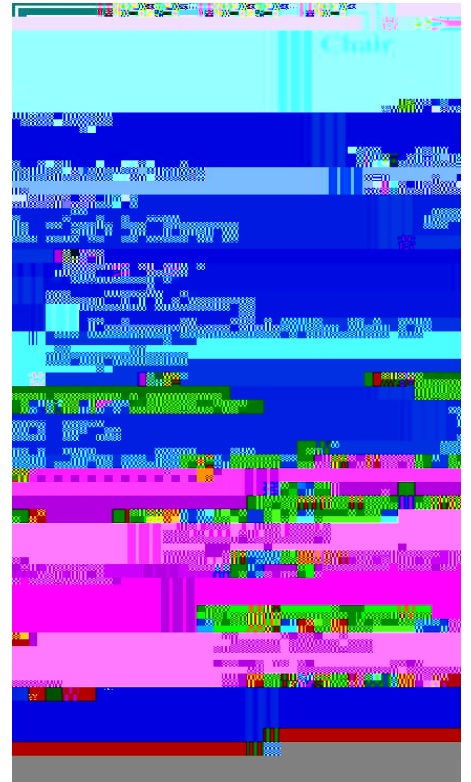
Most of the events at both the Annual and Midwinter conferences

could not happen without the work of the many volunteers needed. I urge every IRRT member to consider volunteering as a committee member. IRRT relies on its members to make it such a great round table—we need YOU!

Other interesting bits of news... If you are going to be at Annual, maybe you'll run into Mr. Yohannes Gebregeorgis, who will be receiving an honorary membership in recognition of his work to bring literacy to Ethiopia.

I will not be at Annual this year, as I am currently overseas for the summer. Moreover, this is my very last issue as Editor of *International Leads*. Come September, a new Editor will be filling these pages with interesting stories about librarianship from around the world. This person will be chosen at Annual, and I wish him or her all the best! It's been a great experience and I appreciate all the Chairs who have supported my effort, and especially Delin Guerra, proofreader extraordinaire. Thank you all!

~ Rebecca L. Miller



**IRRT Web Site:**  
<http://www.ala.org/irrt/>

## Call for Submission

Do you have news about...

- International library activities?
- People in international librarianship?
- Upcoming international conferences?
- International partnerships between libraries?

Then why not submit it to *International Leads*?  
Send your news to [intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com](mailto:intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com)  
for consideration.

*International Leads* (ISSN 0892-4546) is published quarterly by the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association in March, June, September, and December. The first issue was published in 1957. IL contains news about international library activities, the international work of ALA and other organizations, and people and publications in the field. IL is indexed by *Library Literature* and *Library and Information Science Abstracts* (LISA) and is sent free to all members of IRRT (dues \$15); non-ALA members can subscribe for \$12 per year by writing to International Relations Office, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611. Materials for IL are only accepted by email submission to the Editor, at: [intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com](mailto:intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com)

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## A Case Study of Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Supporting the Egyptian Revolution

**By Amany Zakaria El-Ramady**

*Editor's note: The effects of the revolution on Egyptian libraries were described in an article in the last issue. Now, Dr. El-Ramady examines the contribution of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in support of political and societal development.*

Libraries are social entities: for society they are established, and by society they are supported. The ALA stated “*Libraries are the mind and soul of their communities, and librarians are the mind and soul of the library.*” For this reason, libraries should keep pace with societal change.

Speaking about Egypt's tremendous societal, economic, and political changes wrought by the 2011 revolution that took place following a popular uprising beginning on January 25<sup>th</sup>

## Bulgaria

[Continued from Page 1](#)

Bob Anderson was Project Director and Nancy Bolt was Project Manager, both ALA members in the United States, while in Bulgaria Iskra Mahailova was Project Manager. They received grants from the United States Department of State and as part of the project librarians exchanged visits. Ani Popova, Bulgarian librarian, says in her evaluative report that librarians visiting the United States “learned the way American citizens participate in society...that the citizen himself, not the state government, is an architect of his/her way of life.”

Results from the ABLE project included a handbook written for use in training core leaders. Then the leaders trained others in leadership and marketing and focused on developing community information centers in Bulgarian libraries. During the first Bulgarian National Library Week in 2006, government officials and community leaders were invited into libraries to see the programs and resources being offered that help people with social issues and education. A web portal with over 700 sites was developed that libraries could link to. <http://www.ableportal.bg/bg/index-bg.html>

Currently there is an ongoing project with The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Working with the United Nations Development Programme named Glob@l Libraries, they have awarded a \$15 million dollar grant (2009-2013) to Bulgarian public libraries in order to provide free Internet access to 900 libraries, a bilingual Internet portal, and training. Microsoft will donate software. The Bulgarian government is providing \$29 million and is committed to maintaining the program. The project is “designed to facilitate the access of citizens to information, knowledge, communication, e-content and community services.” By July 2010, 455 public libraries had been selected and 120 trainers had attended training sessions.

When I visited in May there were very few computers available for research in the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library. Banks of wooden card catalogs fill corners of the halls even though they have an online catalog. Several librarians told me emphatically that they “maintain the card catalogs for their older patrons.”

The collection includes many rare books including extensive archives from the Ottoman Empire, many Slavic manuscripts, and copies of books published in Bulgaria. Patrons request books at various desks; they are retrieved from packed “depository rooms” and checked out to be used in the library. The library was built in 1953 for 100 staff and one million books. Some additional storage has been provided for the expanding collection of seven million items, but not enough for it and the current staff of 200. Plans exist for expanding the 1953 building, but no money is available. Refurbishing and expansion is needed in many of the libraries. [www.nationallibrary.bg](http://www.nationallibrary.bg)

The National Library contributes digital images to several libraries and has started the process of contributing to the European Digital Library: Europeana. When Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007, funds were made available to them for this project. The European Commission’s Purpose is “to gather cultural heritage items of all European countries.” <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/aboutus.html>

*Interview with Vanya Grashkina, President of the Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA) [www.lib.bg](http://www.lib.bg) and Executive Director of the National Centre for Information and Documentation, Sofia, Bulgaria.*

**EW (Evelyn Weliver): How are libraries different now from the way they were before 1989?**

**VG (Vanya Grashkina):** Before 1989 there was a clear organizational system and lots of money from the state. Libraries were part of the system to influence people’s minds about the Communist ideology. Now school libraries are under the Ministry of

Education and public libraries are under the Ministry of Culture. We have to educate parliament about the importance of libraries. Under socialism they realized their importance and supported them with good funding.

When I worked for the National Library Methodological Centre I traveled around the country visiting many libraries. There were very strong rules for them. If a person checked out a book, such as a novel, they also had to check out a book about Marxism or Lenin. It was part of the state machine, but there was a lot of money for books.

**EW: How did the government know what was checked out?**

**VG:** We had to report the call numbers of books that were checked out.

**EW:** During the Communist period it was very difficult for people to leave the country. This limited participation in international organizations. **What is the situation now?**

**VG:** Now a number of Bulgarian librarians are active in the International Federation of Library Associations and lead various sections of it.”

We also talked about public and school libraries. I shared with her that many of our states provide quality online databases, free of cost, to all citizens through the libraries, including school libraries. In 2009 a Bulgarian law for public libraries was passed to help regulate their organization, financing and activities.

**EW: Is there legislation for school libraries?**

**VG:** We need to have a law for school libraries. Many school libraries are not open all day and most do not have trained librarians. They are only open for library information activities.

Librarians in Bulgaria know that there is still much to be done and they are very capable of doing it. They are working with government officials and legislators, making international connections, and obtaining funding. Librarians and libraries are functioning very differently since 1989.

cial Facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=258460335134>), and its page on Twitter ([http://twitter.com/#!/ba\\_news\\_events](http://twitter.com/#!/ba_news_events)). The library also announced the activities on Alexandria radio, and with an extensive print campaign with brochures and posters in the library entrance and outside the library, like at prestigious social clubs and cultural centers in Alexandria.

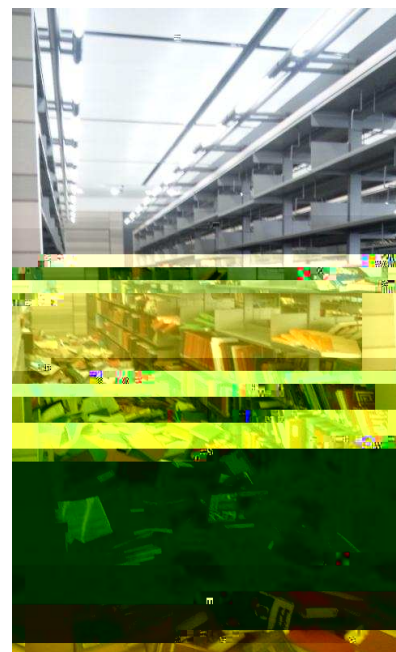
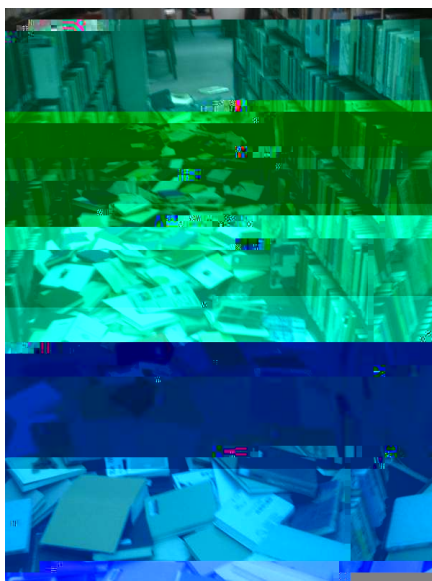
The findings of this study demonstrate that Bibliotheca Alexandrina is actively and effectively going along with Egypt's societal change and require-

## ALA Sends Condolences to Japan Library Association After Earthquakes Strike Country

ALA President Roberta Stevens and Executive Director Keith Michael Fiels sent a letter to the Japan Library Association offering ALA's condolences and support in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

Addressed to President Noboru Shiomi and Executive Director Kaname Matsuoka, the letter read:

"We were deeply distressed to hear the news today about the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. On behalf of the American Library Association, we would like to extend our condolences for those who have lost their lives in these terrible disasters. Please know that ALA members around the world are concerned about our friends and colleagues in your nation. We stand ready to support the Japan Library Association in whatever way we can to help the recovery efforts."



## Free Worldwide Virtual Conference on the State of Libraries Slated for November 2-3, 2011

Just announced, the Library 2.011 worldwide virtual conference will be held November 2-3, 2011. The conference will be held online, in multiple time zones, over the course of two days, and will be free to attend.

The Library 2.011 conference will be a unique chance to participate in a global conversation on the current and future state of libraries. Subject strands will include:

- the changing roles of libraries and librarians,
- the increasing impact of digital media and the e-book revolution,
- open educational resources,
- digital literacy,
- shifts from information consumption to production (Web 2.0),
- multimedia and gaming spaces,
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- understanding users in the digital age,
- assessing service delivery, and
- defining leadership and information professional careers in a networked and changing world.

The conference website will be hosted at <http://www.Library2011.net>.



