

A Million can Make a Difference

Bulgaria's young people 'brainstorm' the country's key development priorities

Last week marked the concluding phase of an essay writing contest “A Million for Development” which was organized jointly by the Bulgaria Development Gateway and World Bank country mission to Bulgaria. The objective of this contest was to provoke mostly young people to express their views about the development priorities of the country, while exploring the possibilities for knowledge sharing provided by the Bulgaria Development Gateway. The competition was open to anyone with original ideas and an interest in the country's development. Participants were expected to suggest ways of investing one million (dollars, or Euro) in Bulgaria's development.

A total of 61 essays were submitted between May 27th and June 25th. The essays were evaluated according to four criteria by a jury comprised of Mr. Georgi Kourtev, Communication Associate, World Bank – Sofia, Mr. Lyubomir Vassilev, Editor-in-Chief, *Kapital* Weekly; Ms. Gergana Mitova, Managing Editor, *Dnevnik* Online; Mr. Ivaylo Georgiev, Coordination Center for Information, Communication and Management Technologies, Council of Ministers, and Mr. Ruslan Stefanov, Economic Program Coordinator, Center for the Study of Democracy. A total of 19 essays were shortlisted by the jury. Contributors and visitors to the portal site also commented on the essays and voted for their winner.

The authors of the 19 highest-ranked and the winner of the online voting presented their ideas and strategies about Bulgaria's future at a debate organized by the Bulgaria Development Gateway on July 24th. All writers of nominated essay joined this event contributing to a lively, diverse and productive discussion. Participants came from all over Bulgaria, representing various professional and educational backgrounds. Each nominee had three minutes to put forward his/her development ideas, followed by a Q&A session and an open discussion.

The scope of ideas encompassed practically all known developmental areas, as defined by the World Bank and other leading international organizations, ranging

from “dreams of the future” and strategic priority setting to concrete projects, including specific financial requirements. Most of them centered on the idea of a new “Bulgarian renaissance”. The lack of a functioning social capital was seen by the participants as the main stumbling block to the long-term development of the country. Hence the profound need for a change in mindsets and leadership in Bulgarian society towards greater personal responsibility and cooperative behavior. Some of the key factors for achieving this change, put forward in the discussion, included:

- education
 - towards an innovative, free-market, and forward thinking;
 - for the creation of a vibrant, critically thinking civil society
- knowledge
 - preserving the existing knowledge and creating new
 - improving the knowledge infrastructure
 - introducing effective knowledge management both in the private and the public sectors
- traditions and cultural identity – focus on what you can do best
- innovation and motivation – building a functioning system for productive imagination.

Tourism is by far the most prospective industry, according to the participants. Almost everybody acknowledged the need for a better and more targeted PR campaign for promoting the country abroad, feeling that its true strengths are still largely undervalued. Participants forecasted that by 2015 - 2020 Bulgaria should have taken its place among the leading nations in the world, noting that patience would be needed in setting the right development course.

The discussion was followed by an official award giving ceremony which brought together high-level government representatives, among whom the Minister of Education Mr. Igor Damyanov. The ceremony was attended by more than 100 people from government and academic circles, businesses and NGOs.



Prizes were presented to the winners by Mr. Oscar de Bruyn Kops, World Bank country manager for Bulgaria and Mr. Sophia Kassidova, deputy minister of transport and high technologies.



The online visitors' prize was awarded to Mr. Tsvetelin Naidenov, 11th-grade student at the Veliko Tarnovo language school. Tsvetelin's idea is to invest in online advertising of traditional Bulgarian products such as yogurt, beer and rose oil. *(with Minister of Education Mr. Igor Damyanov on the photo)*



The third prize went to Mr. Martin Gramatikov, assistant professor at the Sofia University School of Public Administration and research fellow at the Institute for Public Administration and European Integration, for his 'investment' in the development of a knowledge-management system in Bulgarian

public administration as a key component in building a knowledge-based society. His essay was also selected for publication in the *Kapital Weekly*.



The jury awarded second prize to Mr. Alexander Yanakiev, a young expert working at the Ministry of Economy. His idea was to invest a million in development of ‘adventure’ tourism in Bulgaria.



The first prize was awarded to Mr. Assen Alexandrov, a manufacturer and distributor of electronic cash registers. The main idea of his creative essay is that Bulgarians' mindset needs to be changed towards greater self-respect, critical thinking and free expression of personal will.

The contest organizers plan to present a summary of all the ideas and suggestions expressed in the essays and during the live discussion to the Minister of Economy and other government agencies and international donor organizations active in Bulgaria.

Participants also decided to form an ‘alumni’ network and continue their debate online through the Bulgaria Development Gateway portal.

More information on this contest is available (in Bulgaria) at www.bgrazvitie.net/bg/134/