



ALBANIA: AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTS PLIGHT OF ROMA KIDS



Ambassador Withers delivers school supplies to the "Luljeta e Vogel" Kindergarten in a Roma neighborhood, March 2008. The school was refurbished by a USAID anti-trafficking program. [Stephanie A. Pepi, USAID]

U.S. Ambassador to Albania John L. Withers II visited the southeastern town of Korça to talk about the importance to democracy of civic participation and minority rights, including those of the Roma. In addition to delivering school supplies to a Roma kindergarten, the Ambassador visited two Roma families and attended an anti-trafficking signing ceremony between the Korça Municipality and USAID-

funded Transnational Action against Child Trafficking. The newly-signed agreement is aimed mainly at protecting Roma children from traffickers. In remarks before an evening concert by the Korça High School of Music, which performed jazz and blues-inspired musical works, the Ambassador explained why a healthy democracy must protect the rights of all citizens and how civic participation is the means to that end.

KOSOVO: YOUTH EXCHANGE VISITS WITH SERBIA



U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Officer Karyn Posner-Mullen with Youth Initiative for Human Rights participants, March 24, 2008. [Burim Pllana, U.S. Embassy Kosovo]

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights celebrated the last of 28 exchange visits of Kosovo youth to Serbia and Serbian youth to Kosovo. Funded jointly by the U.S. Embassy in Pristina and the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, these exchanges facilitated the

travel of 80 students over the course of nine months. The three-day visits allowed students to experience a place they had heard about in the news, but never had an opportunity to see first hand. Serbian students visiting Kosovo expressed their initial hesitation and even fear of coming to Kosovo, but also their subsequent delight in feeling so safe and welcomed while in the busy cafés of Pristina. The closing event highlighted a memory book of photos and stories about the visits by program participants.

AZERBAIJAN: AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTS U.S. SUPPORT FOR MEDIA FREEDOM



Ambassador Derse (far left) visits grave of slain journalist, March 2008. [Mehdi Huseynquliyev, U.S. Embassy Baku]

U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Anne Derse visited the grave of Elmar Huseynov, an outspoken journalist who was murdered three years ago, to express U.S. support and solidarity for independent journalists and media freedom in Azerbaijan. Ambassador Derse used the occasion to reiterate U.S. calls for the crime to be thoroughly investigated and for the perpetrators to be prosecuted and punished. The U.S. Embassy in Baku is also administering a grant from the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to the Elmar Huseynov Foundation to provide support for investigative journalism as a commemoration of Elmar Huseynov's memory.

AUSTRIA/HUNGARY: U.S. ELECTION SPEAKER DRAWS WIDE SPECTRUM



Audiences in both Austria and Hungary learned more about the 2008 U.S. presidential primaries and election through stimulating talks from commentator Amy Walter, who visited the two countries on a U.S. Department of state-sponsored speaker program. Ms. Walter spoke to over 600 university students, professors, and diplomats at universities and venues throughout Austria and Hungary. A seasoned observer of the American political scene, Amy Walter provided food for thought with unbiased discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of the major candidates and the challenges to be faced in the general election. Ms. Walter is the editor-in-chief of *National Journal's* "The Hotline" newsletter and a CNN political commentator

Above: Amy Walter and students at the University of Applied Sciences in Krems, Austria, March 27-28, 2008. [Christine Mayer, U.S. Embassy Vienna]

CYPRUS: KEEPING KIDS SAFE ON THE INTERNET

While the internet provides great benefits to everyone--especially children--it can pose some dangers for them too, which is why it is critical for parents, caregivers, and educators--the world over--to know everything there is to know about possible hazards and how to help children avoid them. While on assignment in Nicosia, U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Special Agent Byron Militello did several presentations, using real examples from his experience in fighting cyber-crime and child exploitation for local students, parents, and teachers on cyber security and internet safety. In his talks, he provided practical tips on how to identify and avoid potential dangers on the internet and applauded the work of the newly-established Cyprus Police Task Force handling cyber crimes on the island.



FBI Special Agent Byron Militello speaks with local students, parents and teachers on cyber security and internet safety, March 12, 2008. [USAID]

MACEDONIA: DYNAMIC U.S. SPEAKER INTRODUCES THOUSANDS TO UNIVERSAL DESIGN



Vance (2nd from left) chats with audience members long after his filled-to-capacity presentation at American Corner Tetovo, March 2008. [Gazmend Ilazi, U.S. Embassy Skopje]

The Director of the Center for Universal Design, U. Sean Vance, a registered architect, and professor at North Carolina State University, toured Macedonia as part of a U.S. State Department speaker program to spread the word about universal design, which creates design solutions to increase quality of life for people of all ability levels. (Curb cuts, for example, an end result of the Americans with Disability Act, not only make sidewalks easier to navigate for those in wheelchairs but also for those with strollers or rolling luggage.) In his four days of programming, he spoke at four universities, delivered presentations at all three American Corners, consulted with two non-governmental organizations and a school for the visually-impaired, and gave a TV-, a radio-, and two print media interviews. The U.S. Embassy in Skopje estimates that Vance introduced hundreds of thousands of Macedonians to the idea of universal design.

TURKEY: NEW YORK BATTERY DANCE COMPANY MEETS THE WHIRLING DERVISHES

The Battery Dance Company (BDC), a New York-based modern dance troupe, conducted five days of workshops and demonstrations with the mystical Islamic Sufi Order's Whirling Dervishes and their well-known mystic music composer, muezzin Ahmet Calisir. In one of the highlights of the collaboration, the BDC dancers and their choreographer, Jonathan Hollander, held a joint workshop in which they fused their Sufi-music inspired piece with the whirling of a Dervish. Following the workshops, the BDC performed to a packed house of over 500 at Selcuk University. The performance included the debut of a piece that Hollander had dedicated to Calisir. The program demonstrated for a large audience in one of Turkey's most traditional, conservative cities how an Islamic order's religious rituals and a western dance composition can complement each other without compromising the integrity of either. The BDC and the Whirling Dervishes group have planned follow-up programs intended to result in a major performance together.



BDC dancers perform with a Dervish, March 6, 2008 [Craig Dicker, U.S. Embassy Ankara]



GREECE: OUTREACH EFFORTS TO MUSLIM COMMUNITY

U.S. Consul General (CG) Hoyt Yee met with the Association of Minority University Graduates of Western Thrace and also visited their non-profit daycare center to see how the Association and private citizens are working to address the needs of the Muslim minority. The CG also met with a local representative of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss minority integration in Thrace. This important connection with the people of this multi-ethnic part of Greece will only get stronger as the U.S. sponsors visits by American artists and showings of Americans films in the American Corner and the local Cultural Center in the city of Xanthi there.

Above: Consul General Yee and President of the Association of Minority University Graduates of Western Thrace Ahmet Kara at the Association's Day Care Center, March 2008. [Xeni Kosmidou, U.S. Consulate Thessaloniki]

MONTENEGRO: U.S. SAILORS AND DIPLOMATS JOIN FORCES FOR COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The U.S. Navy ship John L. Hall, and its 182 crew members, paid a four-day visit to Bar, the new home port for the Montenegrin Navy. The traditional arrival and reception included the Montenegrin President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Speaker of Parliament. The U.S. Ambassador to Montenegro Roderick Moore and Commander of the ship, A.P. Bennett, toured the local hospital while the Public Affairs Officer of the U.S. Embassy in Podgorica went with sailors to visit elementary and high school English classes, as well the local Faculty of Tourism. The ship arranged for journalists to cover joint training with Montenegrins and speak with the Americans working on board. Several sailors also helped local students paint a high school dorm and planted a symbolic olive tree. Media interviewed the two women on board the ship and did in-depth stories about life in the Navy.



Commander A.P. Bennett and Ambassador Roderick Moore visit a hospital in Bar, March 21, 2008. [EFM Carlos Gallardo, U.S. Embassy Podgorica]

SERBIA: MEDIA WORKSHOP ON INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

As part of the in-country media training program funded by the Support for East European Democracy Act and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade hosted Stephen Coon, international communications consultant, Emeritus Associate Professor, and former Coordinator of Electronic Media Studies in the Greenlee School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Iowa State University. In cooperation with the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia and Media Center Nis, the U.S. Embassy selected 24 young and mid-level journalists from Belgrade, Nis, and local communities throughout Serbia to participate in the training. The groups consisted of journalists from both electronic and print media including major and smaller media outlets. The program allowed the U.S. Embassy to stress the importance of and its support for investigative journalism and media freedom in a developing democracy, and to highlight its role in civil society.



Professor Coon and the participants of the U.S. Embassy's "Investigative Reporting" Seminar, February 29, 2008. [Marina Sokovic, U.S. Embassy Belgrade]

ICELAND: STATE DEPARTMENT SPEAKER REACHES OUT TO MUSLIM COMMUNITY



Above: Imam Bashar Arafat meets with religious leaders at U.S. Ambassador to Iceland Carol van Voorst's residence, March 2008. [Kristinn Gilsdorf, U.S. Embassy Reykjavik]

Imam Bashar Arafat visited Iceland as part of a U.S. State Department speaker program where he participated in a week-long program in Iceland consisting of public and university lectures, meetings with religious leaders, community activists and Muslim community members, and interviews in the media. He generated enormous good will for the U.S. Embassy in Reykjavik with Icelandic Muslims. Non-Muslim Icelanders also responded very favorably to his presentations, commenting on how appreciative they were to learn more about the diversity of the U.S.

SLOVENIA: U.S. EMBASSY PARTNERS IN FIRST MODEL UN FOR STUDENTS

The U.S. Embassy in Ljubljana supported the first International Model United Nations to take place in Slovenia through its Public Affairs Small Grants program. The project involved more than 50 students from different countries, including the U.S., providing them with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of models of international cooperation and gain insight into the process of negotiation and diplomacy. U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Maryruth Coleman addressed the participants at the opening of the event, as did Slovenian President Danilo Tuerk.



Over 50 students from around the world took part in the first International Model UN held in Slovenia, March 6-8, 2008. [Tanja Šuštaršič, U.S. Embassy Ljubljana]



SLOVENIA: SLOVENIANS CELEBRATE AMERICA DAYS

The U.S. Embassy in Ljubljana sponsored "America Days," a festival of American culture that incorporated 17 events over 12 days in six different cities across Slovenia. Events included an American sculpture exhibit, a speaker on U.S. elections, a quartet from Jazz at Lincoln Center, a banjo band, a U.S. high school orchestra, the Slovenian Philharmonic (playing all American composers), a brass band, a choir/performance art group, and a Woody Allen play. The events were well-publicized, well-attended, and reached new Slovene audiences with whom the Embassy rarely interacts. As well, the festival gave the Embassy a valuable opportunity to highlight American culture and perspectives during Slovenia's EU Presidency. Additionally, some of the groups participated in specialized outreach events not open to the public, but targeting select audiences of student groups, victims of abuse, or the elderly.

Above: Bill Bailey's Banjos at the America Days reception, March 14, 2008. [Drea Finnegan, U.S. Embassy Ljubljana]

AZERBAIJAN: EMBASSY NOVRUZ PARTY

U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Anne Derse invited the national media to observe the Embassy community's celebration of the local Novruz holiday. The celebration at the Ambassador's residence featured traditional clowns, characters, dancers, and musicians. The Ambassador led the community in jumping over the traditional bonfire--symbolizing rebirth and a fresh start for the New Year. Novruz is a holiday celebrating the New Year and the coming of spring for several cultures, including Persian and Kurdish.

Right: Traditional Azerbaijani Novruz character with Ambassador Derse, March 2008. [Mehdi Huseynquliyev, U.S. Embassy Baku]



TURKEY: ANNANDALE JAZZ AMBASSADORS THRILL CROWD IN THE HEART OF ISTANBUL



The Annandale (Virginia) Jazz Ambassadors traveled to Turkey to perform and inspire hundreds on Istanbul's historic pedestrian Istiklal Caddesi in Beyoglu. This public concert was organized thanks to the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul and the Beyoglu Municipality. The youth jazz band of 22 students, aged 12-17, travels around the world on goodwill music programs. Their performance in Turkey was a tribute to links between American jazz masters and the influence of Turkey on their work. *Fox TV* news, as well as other TV outlets, covered the event.

Left: Annandale Jazz Ambassadors play on Istanbul's famous Istiklal Caddesi, March 14, 2008. [Craig Kuehl, U.S. Consulate Istanbul]

~ INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EVENTS ~

KOSOVO: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD WINNER

Along with the other five regional winners, and the winners from Iraq and Afghanistan, Valdete Idrizi from Kosovo, proudly accepted her award from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Valdete, an ethnic Albanian, born and raised in Kosovo's Serb majority area of North Mitrovica, has been working on peace-building efforts between Albanians and Serbs since the end of the Kosovo Conflict in 1999. Although she lost her father and brother as well as her home in the war, and was displaced to the South, she has dedicated her life to the recognition that both sides suffered terrible losses, and going forward and forgiving is the only way to survive. Courageously, Valdete began by reaching out to Serb and ethnic Albanian widows directly after the war when bitterness was very fresh--and has organized over 200 programs since then that have addressed all aspects of inter-ethnic conflict, including trying to change the outlook of youth through role-play and theater. Although death and other threats have been common in the past nine years, she has continued to work with the NGO she founded, "Community Building Mitrovica."



International Women of Courage winner, Valdete Idrizi, with Secretary Rice, March 10, 2008. [U.S. State Department photo]



HUNGARY: WOMEN'S RIGHTS ASSOCIATION HONORED

U.S. Ambassador to Hungary April Foley honored Györgyi Tóth as the U.S. Embassy in Budapest's nominee for the International Woman of Courage Award at Central European University (CEU). Ms. Tóth is the Director of NANE, a Hungarian Women's Rights Association that works to combat violence against women. During the ceremony, which was co-hosted by CEU's Human Rights Student Initiative, Ambassador Foley shared her thoughts on Women's History Month and encouraged attendees to follow in the footsteps of courageous women leaders, including Györgyi Tóth. The ceremony was followed by a film screening of the HBO production "Iron Jawed Angels," which tells the story of U.S. suffragist Alice Paul's struggle to secure the right to vote for women in the U.S.

Above: Ambassador Foley with Ms. Gyorgyi Toth, Director of NANE, March 18, 2008. [Linda Mezes, U.S. Embassy Budapest]

MACEDONIA: OUTSTANDING WOMEN RECOGNIZED

The U.S. Embassy in Skopje's sixth annual Women's History Month awards ceremony took place with many past winners in attendance. U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia Gillian Milovanovic told the packed room that they were a true testament to the wealth women bring to society since the room was filled with doctors, entrepreneurs, social workers, teachers, scientists, and politicians, among other professionals. She also stressed the need for all countries to continue to work to provide opportunities to all of their citizens, no matter what gender, ethnicity, or religious background.



Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic and Dr. Zlat Milovanovic celebrate the 6th annual Women's History Month awards with this year's winners. From left to right: Fatma Bajram, Venera Novakovska, Dr. Sofija Tudzarova Karadzina, Dr. Zlat Milovanovic, Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic, Xhane Kreshova, Dr. Smilja Tudzarova-Gorgova, March 27, 2008. [Zoran Jovanovski, U.S. Embassy Skopje]

FINLAND: U.S. AMBASSADOR AND FINNISH PRESIDENT PRAISE AMERICAN-AFGHAN NGO



U.S. Ambassador Marilyn Ware (left) hosts Finnish President Tarja Halonen for an International Women's Day reception, March 7, 2008. [Tuomas Hellman, U.S. Embassy Helsinki]

U.S. Ambassador to Finland Marilyn Ware hosted the President of the Republic of Finland, Tarja Halonen, and over 50 other distinguished guests for a celebration of International Women's Day with a special focus on the women of Afghanistan. President Halonen stressed Finland's commitment to the education of women in Afghanistan and called on the international community to continue its support of this key priority. Ambassador Ware highlighted the work of U.S. non-profit Arzu (which means "hope" in Dari) as an example. Arzu provides sustainable income to 700 Afghan women by selling the rugs they weave and helps weavers and their families break the cycle of poverty by providing them above-market compensation and access to education and health care. President Halonen agreed that organizations such as Arzu are important because they give women a voice and a role in the economic life of their families. Arzu's Vice President for International Operations Michelle Fanzo shared stories of some of Arzu's weavers and the difference the program has made in their lives.

MALTA: WOMAN OF ACHIEVEMENT AWARD PRESENTED

To mark International Women's Day, U.S. Ambassador to Malta Molly Bordonaro hosted a number of prominent Maltese women at a reception at her residence. Guests included distinguished female leaders in business, medicine, politics, academia, journalism, the judiciary, and civil society. During the reception, Ambassador Bordonaro presented the "Ambassador's Woman of Achievement" award to Dr. Katrine Camilleri, Assistant Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service. Dr. Camilleri was recognized for her exceptional and courageous work as an advocate for human rights and for her unflinching commitment to ensuring that irregular migrants in Malta receive adequate



Ambassador Bordonaro presents award to Dr. Katrine Camilleri, March 2008. [Austin Tufigno]



GREECE: CONSULATE HONORS WOMAN OF COURAGE

The U.S. Consul General (CG) in Thessaloniki Hoyt Yee honored Greek prosecutor Irene Chrysogianni as the U.S. Mission in Greece's nominee for the Secretary's International Women of Courage Award 2008. CG Yee presented Ms. Chrysogianni with a certificate signed by the U.S. Ambassador to Greece Daniel Speckhard and spoke about the importance of recognizing women around the world fighting for equality and human rights. A local university professor gave a lecture on the problem of violence against women and detailed Chrysogianni's contributions to the fight against human trafficking in northern Greece.

Above: Prosecutor Chrysogianni with Dr. Papazisi and CG Yee. March 5, 2008. [Isabella Tsirba, U.S. Consulate Thessaloniki]

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