

Fulbright International Summer Seminar: Strategies for Strengthening Democracy: 30 Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall

This project builds upon the rich and successful, 13-year long, experience of the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Commission in organizing international summer schools on a post-graduate level. Some of our former lecturers include: Prof. Mark Kramer (Harvard University), Prof. George Siedel (University of Michigan), Prof. Noemi Marin (Florida Atlantic University).

This year, we propose a **one-week summer seminar** for PhD, MA and BA students (in year 3 or 4) on the topic of “**Strategies for Strengthening Democracy: 30 Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall**”. To achieve optimal outreach, the seminar will be open to students globally. It will be followed by a **one-day public lectures event** in Sofia, **open to general Bulgarian audience**, presenting the outcomes of the seminar workshops and discussions.

The topic addresses the issue of destabilizing social cohesion through devaluing of concepts, key to democracy like: truth, representation, human rights and empathy. In view of the current tensions between liberal and illiberal paths of development, and the rise of disinformation, both in Europe and globally, the seminar will offer access to experts in Political Science, History, Philosophy and Social Sciences, who will outline trends and propose strategies for strengthening democratic institutions, practices and values in the region. Lecturers from the US, Europe and the Black Sea Region will be invited. The organizers aim at attracting leading scholars and diplomats, as keynote speakers.

The purpose of the seminar and the public lectures is to draw attention to the deteriorating democratic environment in Eastern Europe, despite the high hopes after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, as well as to discuss pathways, initiatives and activities for rebuilding it. This event may be particularly relevant to the Bulgarian experience, as the country marks its lowest ranking in media freedom polls, while its persistent label of the “poorest and most corrupt” EU member opens possibilities for influences outside the Euro-Atlantic sphere.