



Marie Curie Alumni Association

Bulgaria Chapter

October 2019 Newsletter

First newsletter of the Bulgaria Chapter of Marie Curie Alumni Association.



MARIE CURIE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
BULGARIA CHAPTER

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Letter from the Editor

by **Viktor Senderov** on October 13, 2019. London

You are holding in your virtual fingers the first newsletter (Oct 2019) of the Bulgaria Chapter of the Marie Curie Alumni Association. The letter has been collaboratively created by our members and is published electronically. This and all future newsletters will be available [here](#).

I hope that we are starting a tradition that will continue for many years to come as our Alumni Association grows bigger and more diverse. With the year drawing to a close, this issue is somewhat of an year-in-review, although certainly I do not claim that we have covered all the stories related to Marie Curie and Bulgaria in it.

We start with two accounts by Anna Antonova and Stanimira Taneva about our first annual meeting that took place in May. Next, the summer conference season is represented by Antoaneta Mateeva with an account of the conference of Marie-Skłodowska Curie Actions that took place in June in Bucharest, by Zhelyu Vladimirov with an account of Researchers Meet Innovators (July, Berlin) and by Anife Ahmedova who attended and wrote about the RRI (Responsible Research and Innovation) conference (September, Brussels).

September was a busy training month for MCAA and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). Mariya Dimitrova attendended a workshop organized by the Joint Innovation Center of BAS, whereas Roumyana Stateva writes about the international workshop that was organized by the Institute for Chemical Engineering of BAS.

We conclude with two contributions to European Researchers' Night by Jovana Ruzic and myself. I would appreciate your feedback on this first issue of the newsletter. What would you like to see in the next issues? Email me, Anife, or Anna with your suggestions, news, or content.

TOP STORIES FROM LAST MONTHS



Annual Meeting and Conference of the Bulgarian Chapter of MCAA

by [Anna Antonova](#) on May 17-18, 2019. Sofia

On May 17-18, thanks to MCAA micro travel grant support, I attended the annual meeting and inaugural conference of the MCAA's Bulgarian Chapter. The meeting had been organised by the Chapter's chair, Prof. Anife Ahmedova, and took place in the Bulgarian Academy of Science's Joint Innovation Centre in Sofia, Bulgaria.

The meeting opened with a panel featuring representatives from the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the European Commission's Representative Unit in Bulgaria, and the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science. Panels throughout both days covered research presentations from Bulgarian MCA awardees and current MSCA-IF fellows, outreach possibilities featuring the British Council and organisers of the European Researcher's Night in Bulgaria, discussions on RISE and ITN schemes, information about upcoming funding possibilities through Horizon 2020 and the Bulgarian government, and finally a skills academy. I myself presented in Saturday's panel on ITN schemes, sharing my experience as a fellow in a past ITN project (ENHANCE), which ran between 2015 and 2019.

In general, the event provided a great opportunity for members of the Bulgarian Chapter to meet and network, both during the panels and at the informal dinner on Friday. It was particularly valuable to hear about the range of excellent research done by other members of the chapter and to learn about some exciting possibilities for sharing and disseminating my research in Bulgaria. Finally, the chapter members meeting Friday afternoon provided a

chance to thank Anife for her tireless organisational efforts in the past year and to allow her to share some of the labour with others. Along with a few other chapter members, I will be (happily) picking up shared responsibilities for communicating and promoting the chapter's work in the coming year.

I am extremely grateful to the MCAA for the opportunity to attend this meeting. I look forward to future meaningful engagements with the Bulgarian Chapter, which increasingly feels like an academic home in Bulgaria.



Presenters at the ITN panel. From left to right, Maria Dimitrova, Viktor Senderov, Anna Antonova, Tanya Tsontcheva, and Anife Ahmedova.

Excellent Science facing the Challenges to Science-based Industries

by **Stanimira Taneva** on May 17-08. Sofia

On May 17-18, I had the pleasure to attend and present my research at the 2019 Annual Conference of the Bulgaria Chapter of MCAA titled “Excellent Science facing the Challenges to Science-based Industries.” This was an exciting event, providing many opportunities for knowledge exchange and networking.

On the first day of the conference, the delegates were welcomed by the organisers as well as representatives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, and the European Commission. Most of the day was dedicated to presentations from past and current fellows. I had the privilege to present my own work and especially the developments associated with my fellowship project (“Thriving at 55+”), funded under FP7 PEOPLE 2012 IEF/ Marie Curie Actions (2013 – 2015). The day concluded with a chapter member meeting and a lovely social event (conference dinner).

The presentations of individual and networking projects of chapter members continued the second conference day. There were plenty of opportunities for having interesting discussions and planning future collaborations. For instance, I am currently in the process of establishing research collaboration with another conference delegate, based in Bulgaria. Also, I agreed to support a current fellow by mentoring.

Overall, this was a great event, with a huge potential for knowledge exchange and collaboration. I learnt interesting things about other people’s research and wider experience, and I hope that I have also contributed to other people’s learning. More than anything, I would like to thank the organisers for their excellent work and the European Commission for providing such incredible opportunities for personal and professional development.



MSCA Conference 2019

by [Antoaneta Mateeva](#) on June 04-05. Bucharest

The MSCA-2019 Conference held on 4-5 June in Bucharest was part of the Romanian Presidency events. I attended the conference hoping to get an update on the development of the future MSCA programme. Indeed, EU officials from Directorate EAC outlined the main features of MSC Actions within Horizon Europe. I noticed several novelties. It's good to know that there will be new names for the different MSC types of action: MSCA Doctorates (current ITN), MSCA Postdocs (current IF), MSCA Staff Exchanges (current RISE), MSCA COFUND (same name), MSCA for Citizens (current European Researchers Night). MSCA budget is expected to remain the same as in Horizon 2020. Inter-sectoral mobility will be strongly encouraged and some incentives for SMEs are still under discussion. Restrictions on resubmission will be introduced in Horizon Europe. However details are not agreed upon yet. Hopefully the restrictions will be well thought in order not to jeopardize the efforts of newcomers. Restrictions will be introduced with regard to scientific age as well – most likely for 6-years of research experience after PhD for MSCA Postdocs applicants (Individual Fellowships). The EC is working on development of new mechanisms providing for improved synergy between MSCA and other EU funded programs - COST, ERASMUS, ESIF. Support will be provided to the EU universities initiative hoping that will help building strong consortia for successful participation in the framework programme.

The conference brought together EC representatives and stakeholders for a broader discussion on the role of MSCA in 4 areas: the widening participation and sharing excellence; improving and facilitating synergies between the next Framework Programme Horizon Europe and European structural funds; careers and mobility for an open European science landscape, MSCA programme as a tool for launching and fostering collaboration through inter-sectoral mobility. Each of these topics was also subject to a parallel session during the Conference.

I participated in the parallel session dedicated to Widening countries. The EC presented 3 consolidated options in this regard:

Option A: Continuation of the current concept: Support for the so called Widening Fellowships with a host in widening countries offering the same conditions as MSCA Individual Fellowships (MSCA Work Programme 2018-2020).

Option B: Alternative Widening Fellowship accommodated in the Widening part of the Programme – with dedicated calls for 2-year fellowships for former MSCA fellows to return or to move to a host in a widening country, with the same conditions as MSCA fellowships and open to any nationality and number of years of researcher's experience.

Option C: Alternatives for Widening Fellowships through MSCA - by either offering separate 1 year grant to MSCA individual fellows to return/move to a host in a widening country (longer duration of MSCA fellowships) or by establishing a co-funding action for countries to specifically attract researchers.

The EC schedule is to draft the first Horizon Europe Work Programme at the end of this year and then get it finally approved in 2020. All interested parties were invited to participate in the discussions during and beyond the Conference thus helping the EC to finally shape-up the Programme.

In addition, I'd like to invite all chapter members to follow [this link](#) and contribute to the EU online consultation, which is open by 8 September 2019.



Researchers meet Innovators

by **Zhelyu Vladimirov**, on July 11-23, Berlin

I attended this two-day meeting Researchers meet Innovators (11-12 July, Berlin) in order to better understand how academia can contribute to different innovations. On July 11 after the registration we had two very useful meetings with researchers who have started or are ready to start their businesses. They shared their experience in moving from research to business, including some issues and the respective achievements. They answered a lot of questions, concerning the role of their mentors/professors, other people of their teams, etc. They also explained the potential sources for financial means in order to start the business.

After that I joined the panel discussion on the EU funding for research driven companies, moderated by Marina Rantanen Mod  r. During this session we have been explained where to look for potential financing for such companies. The lecturers have described the opportunities of Horizon 2020, ERC, and other financial bodies, paying special attention on the high level requirements, and the increasing competition. During the social event we had an opportunity to get to know each other better around a glass of beer. Participants from Turkey, Serbia, Russia, Switzerland and many other countries shared their experience on different research topics, grants, trips, and lives in other countries.

On July 12, I attended the first workshop from 8.30 on Design Thinking, headed by Nierika Hamaekers. The moderator presented this approach in a very interactive way, which visualised its great potential to generate new ideas, new solutions, and new prototypes. Particularly interesting was the group work on the task how to invent 30 ways to squeeze the lemon. The group started this task quite hesitantly, but moving further all of us have

been surprised how many ways could be found to “squeeze the lemon” or instead to generate new ideas. No less challenging was the second task, which consisted in how to redesign the gift-giving experience of other partner when working in pairs. It assumed to share mutually some personal difficulties in the gift-giving experience, for which the other partner should find some solutions. The task helped to know much better the other partner.

Immediately after this workshop I was involved in the second workshop on the creation of business model canvas, directed by Maria Peeva. The work consisted in the creation, justification, calculation, and marketing of the new product/service. Our group took the idea of one of the group members, who was from Italy, but working presently in the Max Plank Institute on meteorology project. She proposed an almost ready model from this institute on weather forecasting not for the whole territory of a given country, but for particular region, district, or city. We considered this model as a useful means for local municipalities, businesses, and individual citizens, as it could prevent a lot of potential damages. The project has been successfully defended, and all the questions well answered.

In general, I could say that this meeting was really quite helpful in understanding how researchers and innovators can synergistically and successfully work together, which was its main goal. My trip was supported by the MCAA micro-grants.



The business model canvas

Short report on the participation in the RRI Conference – Pathways to Transformation

by **Anife Ahmedova**, June, Brussels

Here I want to bring to your attention a few points from the RRI (Responsible Research and Innovations) event in Brussels, which I attend, and found possibly useful to our Association. In general, this was a joint conference of two projects that are finishing this September :

<https://www.rri-practice.eu/>

<http://www.nucleus-project.eu/>

As a conclusion, they end up with a common declaration, together with 8 more projects of this kind, <http://pathways2019.eu/declaration/>.

Herein, I list some of my personal notes and potentially useful contacts for future collaborations.

- In the Horizon Europe Framework program the SwafS Programme will most probably be abandoned and there will be strong recommendations in all Missions-defined topics to implement the RRI practices in all projects, so that Missions will integrate the Open Science & RRI (like art.10) in all projects. [Missions to be decided with citizens-organizations in the on-going discussion on the framework content (June-August 2019)]
- Partnerships of the type public-private-citizens-scientists will be recommended to make R&I more value-driven. - Here is where MCAA could focus on developing expertise and training to be prepared for partnering in many projects in the future.
- An NGO from Bulgaria (ARC Fund) is extremely active in EU projects since 1991. They are partners in the RRI-Practice project responsible also for the dissemination WP. They are involved in another similar project that started in April 2019 (TeRRItoria) that might be interesting to MCAA if they still can adopt partners). I've got in touch with the program director, Zoya Damianova, and we'll meet in early September to see possible areas for joint events and collaborations.

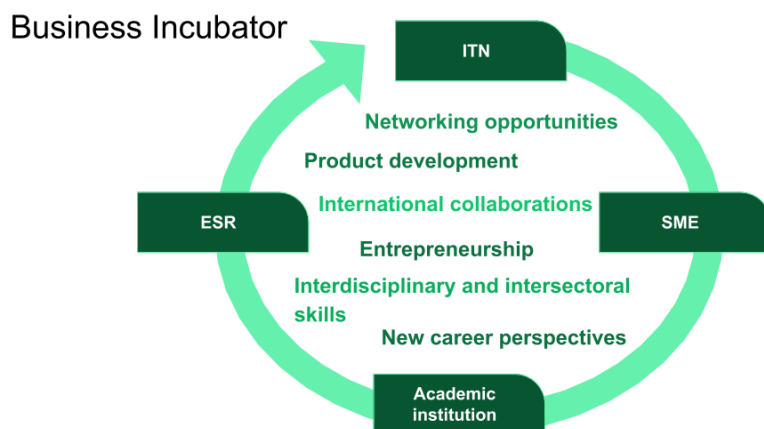
ITN Proposal Writing Training

by Mariya Dimitrova, on September 17-18, Sofia

On the 18th of September, I participated in the ITN Proposal Writing Training, organised as part of the project Network of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action National Contact Points for the mobile scientific and innovation community - Net4MobilityPlus. The training promoted the Innovative Training Networks amongst researchers and provided tips on proposal writing and application.

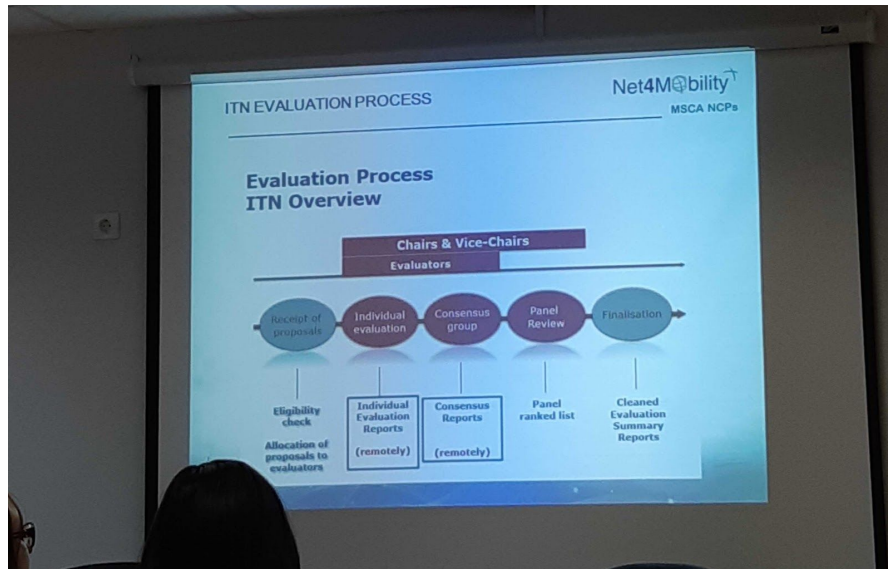
Workshops took place on 17th and 18th of September in the Bulgarian Academy of Science's Joint Innovation Centre in Sofia, Bulgaria. Participants had the opportunity to read an ITN proposal and assess it according to the grading schema used by project evaluators. Moreover, several presenters shared their own experience with ITN grant application.

One of them was Prof. Pavel Stoev, the Editorial Director of Pensoft, who gave a talk on the company's experience with the ITN projects IGNITE and BIG4, in which myself and fellow MSCAA alum Viktor Senderov are a part of. His presentation emphasized the importance of collaborations between academia and industry in an ITN and the role of networking and outreach for establishing such collaborations.



Collaborations between academia and industry in an ITN consortium are beneficial for everyone involved (slide from Prof. Pavel Stoev's presentation)

Another valuable talk during the training was given by the ITN proposal evaluator Assoc. Prof. Ivanka Tsakovska, who shared with us what the evaluation process looks like. What surprised me was the number of steps each project goes through during evaluation and the extent of communication between evaluators.



Overall, it was a great event which fostered a lot of discussions and gave valuable insights into the ITN proposal and application process!

IProBio Workshop

by Roumiana Stateva on Sep 23-24, 2019. Sofia



Roumiana Stateva

The Project: “Integrated Process and Product Design for Sustainable Biorefineries (IProPBio)” commenced in 2018 and is financed for four years from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (H2020-MSCA-RISE-2017), under grant agreement No 778168.

Within the time span of IProPBio four Workshops: “Valuable products from residual biomasses: Towards a greener society (ProGreS)”, where the achievements of the research related work packages will be presented, are envisaged to take place at different venues.

ProGreS First Workshop: Biomass selection, characterization and valorization, was organized by the Institute of Chemical Engineering, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences – one of IProPBio Lead Beneficiaries, and took place in Sofia on September 23-24 2019. The Workshop coincided, and was included in the Calendar of Events celebrating the 150 jubilee of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Over 30 scientists from 10 Countries (Brazil, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, and UK) participated and presented as oral and poster communications the results achieved during the first year and a half of the IProPBio project. It was a great honor for ProGreS First Workshop organizers and all participants to welcome Professor Sir William A. Wakeham, FREng, who delivered the Workshop Invited Keynote Lecture: "The Dangerous Nexus of Process Simulation, Molecular Modelling and Physical Reality".

From the twenty poster communications presented, the Jury – Prof. M. Errico (IProPBio Coordinator), Prof. J.A.P. Coelho and Prof. D.S. Yankov, awarded First Prize to:

O. Becerra-Pérez, S. Georgopoulos, H.E. Reynel-Ávila, D.I. Mendoza-Castillo, M. Papadaki, and A. Bonilla-Petriciolet: "Recovery of bioalcohols with potential as biofuels using an energetically sustainable separation strategy",

which was accepted by Dr. H.E. Reynel-Ávila from the Department of Chemical Engineering, Instituto Tecnológico de Aguascalientes, Mexico.

More information about the IProPBio Project, ProGreS First Workshop and its scientific programme can be found on the IProPBio site at: <http://ipropbio.sdu.dk/>

Hall of FameLab

by **Viktor Senderov** on Oct 27, 2019. Natural History Museum, London.



From left to right Tim Slingsby: Director of Skills and Education at Lloyd's Register Foundation, London; Christina Melidou: Partnership manager at FutureLearn, FameLab Greece participant 2008; Anne-Marie Imafidon MBE: Co-founder and CEO of Stemettes.

Yours truly, editor of this issue, participated successfully in the science communication event boldly named Hall of FameLab that took place during European Researchers' Night (a MSCA event) this Oct 27 at the Natural History Museum in London. The motto of the event was "the collaborative work of scientists around the world is helping us to understand the interconnected nature of our planet and to conserve the web of natural connections that we depend on to survive." Lyubov and Ivaylo from the British Council thought that my work on computer languages and phylogenetics might be slightly relevant to the topic. Even though I was not so sure about it, with the help of some props obtained from Costco's (a pineapple), I was able to entertain three judges much smarter than me, Quentin Cooper

(host, both smarter *and funnier* than me), and two hundred or so science-hungry museum goers.

My talk was about my childhood fascination with the shared ancestry of everything on the Planet. We are literally all relatives: humans and pineapples, even! I am grateful to the public for funding my research, which inevitably helps us, as *Homo sapiens*, understand our revolutionary place, even if this research has to do with other living organisms.

The second idea of the talk was that language is one of the most powerful instruments that we, as scientists, have to reason about inter-connections. As an illustration, I present a computer language on which I am working, TreePPL.

European Researchers' Night in Burgas

By **Jovana Ruzic** on September 27, 2019 Burgas

On September 27, the European Researchers' Night has been organized all over the globe. First Researchers' Night events were organized in 2005, and so far more than 2 millions visitors had a chance to participate in various exhibitions, shows, open labs, live experiments, etc. Opportunities for the open discussions and interactions with researchers bring them and their research much closer to the general public. These events are funded by Maria Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and are being organized to promote science and present current findings to a wider audience. This year in Bulgaria, Researchers' Night was held in 14 cities simultaneously. As a current Maria Skłodowska-Curie fellow, I took a part in such event which was held in coastal town Burgas, in front of the Archaeological Museum. In order to present ongoing DeMoMet project and bring closer composite materials especially to the young ones, we used 3D models of various crystal structures. 3D models were made by 3D printer and in different color representing structures of ceramics and metals such as iron and copper. The main idea was to show how to build a composite material with metal matrix. Kids and older participants used 3D models for making their own composites and throughout puzzle game they learned some basics of composite materials science. At the end, participants kept 3D models as a souvenir of Researchers' Night event.



Participants while observing and playing with 3D model of the crystal structures as well as making their own composite materials.

Next Chapter Meeting

Join us in Sofia on October 25, 2019 from 14:00 - 17:30 for our next Annual Meeting (venue **Info center of the Joint Innovation center of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences** – “Acad. G. Bontchev” street – bl. 26B). Looking forward to seeing you there!

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