

Host organization: South – West University “Neofit Rilski”, Blagoevgrad

Country: Bulgaria

Organization role: Beneficiary

Project Acronym: KEAC-BSR

Project start and end date: 1.1.2017 – 1.1.2021

Type of MSC action, H2020: RISE



Your story:

Project objectives and research field:

The project establishes a network consisting of 12 research institutions from 11 Black sea region (BSR) countries and Austria. It includes representatives of all the core disciplines of the humanities emerging in 19 – 20 centuries. Our project is interdisciplinary and includes specialists in history, anthropology, linguistics, literature. We attempt to systematically investigate knowledge and cultural exchanges between the BSR and Western Europe from the late 18th century to the present. We combine theoretical and methodological approaches with the potential to establish new pathways for future research and in its foregrounding of gender aspects.

Tell us why the topic is important and/ or how it brings to advancement in your research field:

The topic provides insights into the significance of cultural exchange as well as unique possibilities for scientific cooperation between Austria and countries of the Black sea region – Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Romania. Our specializations in non-European countries provided us with a chance to read critically the archives and researches and to outline silenced or neglected topics, personalities and facts. The comparative research allowed us to elaborate common patterns of knowledge exchange between Europe

and the countries of Black sea region. We emphasize the role of women in science and their contributions to the exchange of knowledge in the region.

What are the benefits of participating in a MSC action?

The long terms of secondments (2-3 months) in the foreign academic institutions not only provide opportunities for significant research but also integration in the academic life of these institutions (joint conferences, workshops, giving lectures). The project contributes to enlarging the scope of our Balkanistic researches to include countries of North and South Caucasus. In a region which has inherited many fields of tensions and conflict we promote cooperation, common cultural patterns and knowledge about diversity of the European identity. The comparative research underscores the historical periods of deficit and isolation which have to be explained and reconsidered. Especially valuable is the project experience for PhD students who have the chance to work in an intercultural and interdisciplinary scientific environment.

Did you encounter any challenges during application/ implementation and did you get any help?

During the research we encountered contradictory allegations in the national historiographies in Caucasus and on the Balkans. Other challenges were the different traditions and regimes of access to archives.

What helped us concerning the access to archives and libraries is our common research experience in the frame of our previous Marie Curie project.

Would you recommend others to apply? What useful advice/ tips can you give them?

We recommend to scholars with good scientific networks and ideas to apply. It is very provoking and useful to work on topics concerning Balkans in the wider frame of the countries of the Black sea region. The project outlined the scientific and cultural importance of Europe not only for the countries of Europe but for much wider geographical space.

What strategies did your organization use to attract the fellow/s? Are they in line with national strategies supporting the widening EC policy?

We work in the Seminar of Balkan Studies and Specialization to the South – West University with 28 years of history which allowed us to establish a wide network of researchers not only in the Balkans. Thanks to the European projects we publish papers from many countries of the Black sea region in our journal “Balkanistic forum”. This way we enlarge the audience of the journal. On the other side we have also the possibility to publish our research in our partner’s editions. We used our long term networks and collaboration with the Institute for Southeast History at Graz University led by Prof. Karl Kaser as well as the scientific contacts created in the last 15 years

between the Balkan Seminar at the South-West University “Neofit Rilsky” and Shota Rustaveli University, Batumi, Georgia which contributed for enlarging our network in South Caucasus region. This network was successfully used and widened in the EU Project “Memory Politics and Memory Cultures of the Russo-Ottoman War 1877 – 1878: from Divergence to a Dialog”. The successful projects collaboration, the Balkan Seminar participation, the Journal “Balkanistic Forum” publications as well as the Balkan-Caucasus Research Centre at the South-West University activities made this framework sustainable.