



Human Stories

13th edition

**British Council Europe: celebrating our community.
Working together to shape a better world.**

Championing science through the British Council in Bulgaria

Lyubov Kostova worked with the British Council for 23 years, becoming the first locally appointed – and first female – Director in Bulgaria (2012–2022). Science as a powerful tool for cultural relations was at the heart of her work.

'It all started in 2003 with the first science communication training for researchers and journalists in Bulgaria, followed by Café Scientifique in 2004. Then came Beautiful Science in 2007, our first regional science project across nine countries. We introduced new models of public engagement with science: a competition ([FameLab](#)), a science show (Science Made Simple), and public debates. Contrary to expectations, the impact was immediate – media, ministries, researchers and industry all wanted to be part of it. FameLab's digital footprint grew so fast that we had interview requests from around the world.'

The long-term legacy includes the Sofia Science Festival, launched in 2011 and now a national fixture, as well as many new science events in Bulgaria and beyond, including taking [FameLab](#) to Antarctica for the first time ever in 2025 and hosting 2 BBC science shows at the festival in Sofia. FameLab alumni have gone on to leading academic and policy roles, continuing the ripple effect.

This year, Lyubov received the Honorary British Empire Medal for her contribution to science and education.

'I was humbled to be the first person in Bulgaria in this field to receive the recognition. I owe it to my work and my colleagues at the British Council.'

Today, she runs the Beautiful Science Foundation, which she co-founded with former colleagues.



Coding Change: From Hackathon to UNESCO

Natasha Litherland first connected with the British Council through the [Youth Connect: Tech for Humanity hackathon](#) in Paris. The experience led her to Scotland for a study trip with 26 young people from across Europe and Oman, building a network to engage with UK institutions and inspire positive social change.

'I'm currently studying Computer Engineering and Global Design – fields which, in my opinion, sit precisely at the intersection of technology and human-centred thinking, which the Youth Connect programme addresses.

One of the most impactful takeaways from the hackathon was gaining a deeper understanding of the political and ethical dimensions of technology [...]. I appreciated how the programme highlighted the broader ecosystem of innovation, introducing us to various actors and perspectives that shape the tech landscape.

The hackathon strengthened both technical and soft skills, while the study trip helped me develop networking and public speaking confidence, learn how AI can be used in the humanities [...], and explore start-ups, robotics, and applied technology. Connecting with experts using Large Language Models (LLMs) for language preservation was especially inspiring and affirming.'

Natasha was recently selected for the steering committee of UNESCO's Global Youth Community, ready to apply her British Council experience to future projects — a testament to the lasting impact of [Youth Connect](#).





Young people shaping change in Serbia through SPARK

The British Council's [SPARK: Skilled Youth](#), Empowered Communities programme, funded by the UK Government, supported young people in Novi Pazar, Bujanovac, and Preševo to design and deliver projects that strengthened social cohesion. Through training, mentoring, and teamwork, participants discovered how much impact they could have when they acted together.

The most successful applicants were awarded a trip to Northern Ireland, where they spent a week with youth organisation R-City, exploring community-led change and peacebuilding, sharing experiences, and building new friendships.

Here, six participants reflect on what the SPARK journey meant to them.

- *'Every change starts within ourselves, yet it becomes even more meaningful when you see your city growing and evolving alongside you.'* – **Muhamed Smakić**
- *'My favourite part was the realisation of our Push Me project because it opened up opportunities for new projects and new workshops that I could go to — it was really a wonderful experience.'* – **Melisa Prtinac**
- *"The SPARK programme showed me that unity is not just important — it becomes unstoppable when people share the same vision."* – **Hanifa Ujkanović**



Young people shaping change in Serbia through SPARK – Part 2

- *‘Before joining, I mostly thought of projects as something only professionals or organisations could create. SPARK taught me that young people also have the power to identify problems, design solutions, and take action.’ – **Ferhad Zoranić***
- *‘Most inspiring to me was seeing teamwork turn one person’s dream into projects for the benefit of many. Now I understand that change starts when we are brave enough to try it.’ – **Demir Mekić***
- *‘I learned that we don’t have to wait for someone else to bring about change — sometimes we can take the first step ourselves. There is a unique pride that comes from seeing an idea grow into reality.’ – **Altana Mujović***

Dialogue takes root in Lithuania

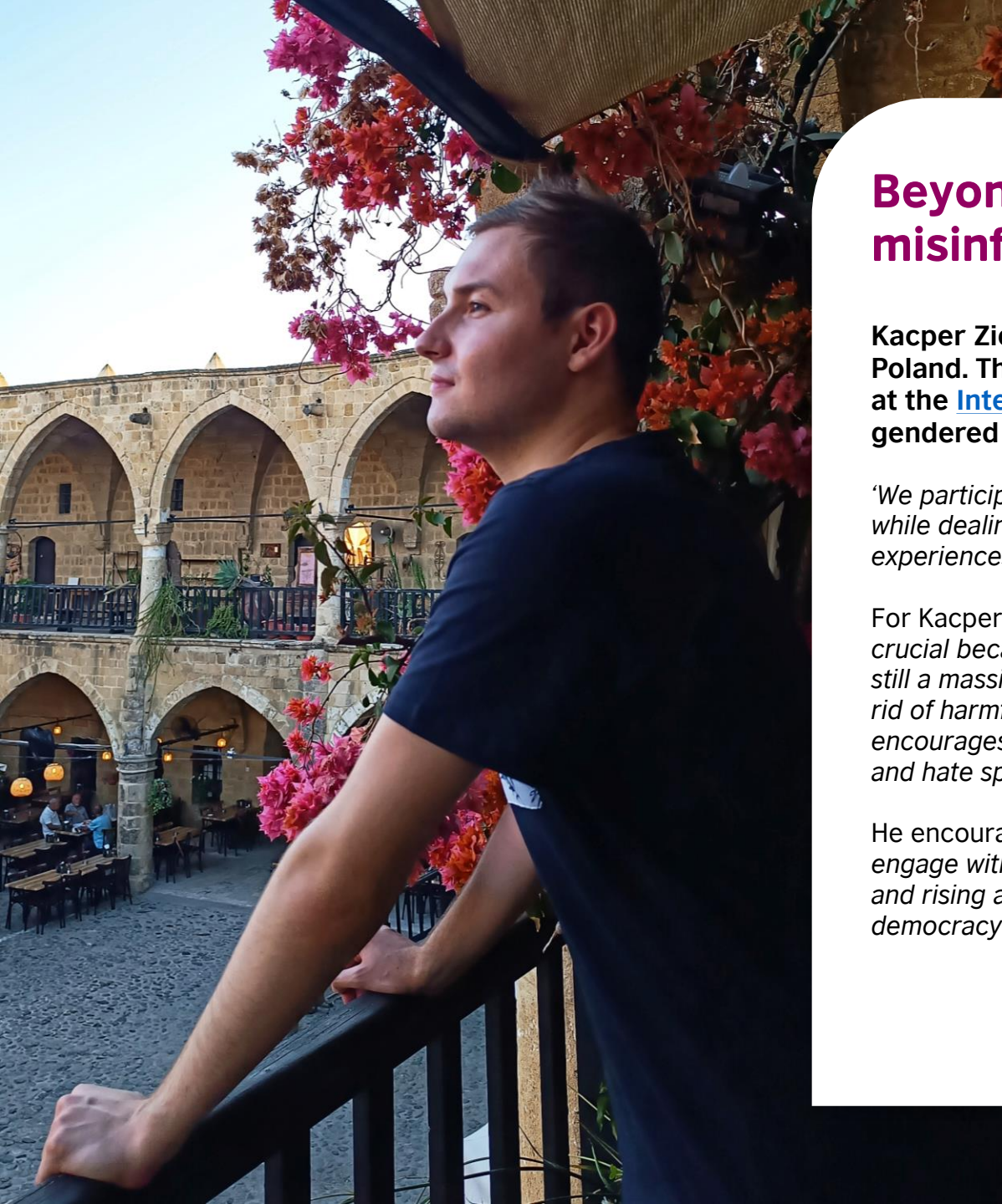
Through the British Council's [People to People programme](#), Aurelija Pluke and her colleagues have been implementing the Dialogue Communities project, supporting cultural and civic organisations across Lithuania to strengthen resilience and foster social cohesion.

The project engages participants in creative sessions, interactive exercises, and collaborative mapping of networks. Through creative workshops and community events, it helps communities connect, open up space for dialogue, and create inclusive environments where diverse voices and perspectives can be acknowledged and valued.

‘At the heart of community life is the ability to listen and connect,’ says Aurelija, who works with the association [Kūrybinės jungtys](#) (Creative Connections).

Alongside her work in community dialogue, Aurelija has a personal passion for mushrooms and mycology — she even hosts a TV show on Lithuania's national broadcaster LRT dedicated to the topic. It is this unique combination of professional dedication and personal curiosity that makes her approach to community building so distinctive.





Beyond the comfort zone: Challenging gendered misinformation

Kacper Zieleniak, 24, is a journalism graduate working in the media sector in Poznań, Poland. This year, he joined young people from Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus at the [International Media Literacy Conference](#). The programme focused on tackling gendered misinformation and promoting inclusive communication.

'We participated in workshops connected to fact-checking. I learned how to look for useful clues while dealing with various statements, claims and graphic materials. We also shared our experiences – it was stimulating to listen to cases from different countries.'

For Kacper, the issue has far-reaching consequences. *'The topic of gendered disinformation is crucial because it affects everyone, not only women or transgender people. Gender inequality is still a massive issue worldwide, and unfortunately, the media doesn't necessarily help in getting rid of harmful stereotypes or prejudice. Staying silent when someone lies and defames others encourages more of such behaviours. Educating people and actively opposing misinformation and hate speech makes a difference – even if we don't see the results right away.'*

He encourages others to take part in similar initiatives: *'Step out of your comfort zone and engage with people from different backgrounds. In the age of artificial intelligence, fake news and rising authoritarianism, it's crucial to stay alert and defend values like inclusivity, tolerance, democracy and access to knowledge.'*



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