

## Europe, as we want it to be

In a tiny country in South-eastern Europe, in a small village named Iskrets, there lived smiling and hard-working people. They all knew each other and if someone was about to go somewhere, they left their animals and their house to their neighbour. They only had one problem – they refused to educate themselves, that is why they did not have a school in the village. This is exactly why one of our heroes stands out so much.

Iliya was a tall young man with blond hair and blue eyes, his younger brother Ivan was also a handsome guy. They loved studying and in spite of their modest life in the country, they always succeeded in learning something new.

A few houses down the street lived a very modest girl – her name was Gergana. She had long auburn hair and eyes like black olives. The two brothers she spent every day with made her keen on studying.

One day the three of them, led by their curiosity, went to the neighbouring village to look for something new, something different. By chance, they reached the school. There were no children there.

- Where is everybody? - Gergana wondered.

They entered the courtyard and heard the teacher tell the pupils about the incredible Europe:

- Europe is a continent. Except our country, many more countries are situated in that continent and they all have their traditions and landmarks. In France, for example, the Eiffel Tower is located. In Great Britain, there is Big Ben, the London Eye .....

The three youths were listening carefully.

- Children – the teacher went on, - Europe is our home and we have to know it. Everyone who has that opportunity should visit the continent's landmarks.

And then the school bell rang.

On their way home, the three friends discussed what they had heard. Iliya thought the teacher was only imagining things. There is no way such a big metal tower existed, or something called Ferris wheel, which again is made of metal.

- How can he make that up – his brother interrupted him, - he is a teacher.

On the next morning, the three friends continued discussing what they had heard. Time passed and they wanted more and more to see Europe.

One day Ivan suggested:

- Let's go around Europe.

- Ivan, how can we go around it? Where shall we get the money from?

This problem haunted the explorers for a long time but finally there was a solution and they gathered sufficient funds.

-All right, so we will start from the southern coast, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and we come back home.

- What is there to see – a sea! We have a sea here. I suggest that we go to the north – Moldova, the Ukraine, Norway, Finland.

- So what exactly will you see there?- Gergana interferred – We'd better pass through Hungary, the Czech Republic, Germany, Great Britain and then back home again.

They could not decide where to travel to, as everyone claimed his or her countries were the most interesting. They quarrelled.

In the end they agreed that each of them should go along the route he or she had suggested and that the end point for all three of them should be London – there they would decide which countries are the most beautiful.

Iliya went along the southern coast. He went to Italy- with a legendary history and great pasta. And Venice – oh, Venice – with those canals and the beautiful architecture. Who wants to leave such a lovely place.

But our hero did not know what would follow after that – France, of course. There he saw the Eiffel Tower, the same tower the teacher was talking about. It was, oh, so big and there were so many people around. He walked through the city of love and even fell in love with a beautiful French girl but then he had to go on with his travel to Spain.

There he visited Madrid – a splendid city. He saw the king's palace and even felt like a king for a while. Nice thoughts, dear Iliya – everyone thinks he is a king sometimes! But kings also have to travel so he left for Portugal. He walked to Lisbon. Do you know what he saw there? Campo Pequeno, the Bullring. It was very interesting. How could he leave? So, knowing that he had to go to Great Britain to meet his brother and Gergana, he stayed for a little while, just to be able to enjoy the beautiful botanical garden.

But not only Iliya toured the world. His brother also left but in the opposite direction – to the north. First he stopped in Moldova. Ivan was most interested in history so he visited Old Orhei. He did not forget to walk around the central part of the capital city. He liked Moldova very much and he learned some traditional recipes as well. Although he was not much of a cook, some very kind ladies taught him how to make mititey. His next destination was Ukraine. When he arrived in Kiev, he visited the Saint Sofia Cathedral. He walked around Odessa as well.

It was such a nice place, he did not want to leave but then he remembered that Norway was the next country and left in order to immerse into a totally different culture. Well, it was real fun there! All signs were in some incomprehensible language. He had planned to go to the Lofoten Islands where he hoped to see the Northern Lights. Ivan was trying to ask the passers-by how to get there but with not much luck. Anyway, I don't know how but he managed to get to the spot. Unfortunately, he had no luck and could not see the phenomenon but he met many people and saw great sights. This time he was determined not to continue his travel. He refused to leave the islands, to say nothing about the country. The locals had difficulties convincing him to go to Finland. In fact, he had to change his plans for that country and instead of Helsinki, he went to Linanmaki. Ivan approved the new plan even more. He had great fun in the amusement park and he even used the opportunity to enjoy each attraction several times. He knew his next destination was London where he would meet his brother and Gergana, so he hurried to reach it so that he could tell them about his experiences.

What about Gergana? Keep calm, she left too. Like every girl, she was thinking more about her luggage than about the places she was about to visit. She wondered if she had taken her most

beautiful outfits, bearing in mind that the entire Europe was going to tee her. After long wondering, she started her journey from Hungary. Gergana wanted to see a fairytale place, so she went to Tata. She watched the birds around the lakes and enjoyed rivers and canals. She even saw a castle but unlike Iliya, she did not imagine that she was a queen simply because she hurried to see the Czech Republic. She went to Chesky Krumlov – it is true that it is a fairytale. And if you only knew what boys there are. Gergana found them and she immediately started a conversation with a handsome guy. He had eyes blue like the water, and, wow, when he just looked at you with those eyes ... I'm sorry, I got carried away. But to tell you the truth, that's what I only remember from the stay in the Czech Republic. In Germany, however, Gergana was not looking at the boys only but she was enchanted by the magnificent Castle of Neuschwanstein. Well, there she felt like a princess and remembered that handsome guy from the Czech Republic with the wonderful eye... I'm sorry, I got carried away again. Our girl also went to Europa Park. It was very much fun, and Gergana wished they had a park in their village as well.

The time came when our travellers had to meet in London and tell about their experiences. It was a little hard for the three of them but anyway they managed to find the large city. First they walked to the Buckingham Palace. Did you know about those guys, even if you pull their noses they won't make a move. Our explorers did it, of course. To tell you the truth, they did not move indeed. Then they saw Big Ben. Yes, that's the big clock they heard about from the teacher. It is real.

- Well, Iliya, what interesting things did you see?- asked his brother with an easily detectable pride that what he had seen was the most beautiful.

- I saw what I saw. Only great places. I visited Venice, with those wonderful canals and I passed under the Rialto Bridge. I also ate delicious pasta. Do you know what I saw in France – the Eiffel Tower. Yes, it is really very high and made of metal.

He did not say anything else about France. How could he, the other part was the story with the girl. She told them about the palace in Madrid and the bull-fight arena in Portugal.

- What about you Ivan, you seem to be very proud of the places you visited. Where did you go?

- Well, where, in Moldova. They taught me how to cook their traditional meals. I visited Kiev, such a beautiful place, you should regret for not coming with me. Also, I fell in love.

- And who did you fall in love with!?- His friends asked, very astonished.

- I fell in love with Norway, my dears. Wonderful views and wonderful people. And Finland. Oh, what great fun it was there! I went to an amusement park and there were so many interesting places. I enjoyed most of the attractions several times.

- What about you Gergana, you seem so silent, what did you see?- Iliya who secretly liked her, asked. But he didn't know about that handsome Czech guy with the blue eyes, oh, when I just think of him ... I'm sorry but he is gorgeous, well, all right, I promise I will not get distracted again.

- Me? I went to Tata.

- Tata?!- The boys wondered. They had never heard of that name. – What is that?

- It is a place from the fairy tales, with beautiful lakes and rivers. And the birds there are living as if they live in heaven. I also went to Chesky Krumlov.

She did not tell them what had happened there but no one noticed anyway.

- After the Czech Republic I felt like a princess in the Castle of Neuschwanstein in Germany. It is an amusement park and I just did not want to leave but I couldn't wait to tell you everything.

- Well, according to what was told, which is the most interesting place? I am sure my countries are the most beautiful – Ivan said.

- No, my dear brother, the countries to the south are magnificent, they are more beautiful than all the rest.

- I don't agree with any of you – Gergana said - the countries I visited are the most interesting.

So, our characters had a quarrel again. This time they were at a very crowded place, in front of the Buckingham Palace. What a coincidence, at that time the Queen was coming out of the palace and for some strange reason, she found out what the reason for the dispute was.

- Children – she turned to them- and as she was accompanied by an interpreter, communication was easier – I understand you have travelled around Europe. I see you are eager to learn. Please do not spoil your precious friendship. I can give you the answer to the question: „ Which are the most interesting countries?”.

- Really?- the youths were surprised.

- Yes, Europe is one whole and there is no most interesting country. Like all the fingers of the hand, which are the same, but with different names, it is so with the countries in Europe. Children, you have succeeded in seeing just a small part of the most beautiful places but there are so many others like them. You gathered the money to travel around Europe and witness its beauty but many like you do not have that chance. Let us keep our home clean, beautiful and precious. Let us not allow to destroy what we already have. Let us take care that each European gets to know their home, and that is to say – Europe.

After that, the young curious Bulgarians returned to their small village and talked about their adventures and the Queen's appeal. Their fellow villagers were so enthusiastic, that they built a school in the village and guess who were the first teachers. Following the Queen's advice, they took their pupils to travels around Europe and showed them those beauties they themselves had seen.

Iliya, Ivan and Gergana trained new teachers. Thus, the school grew fast and children from other villages started to come to learn here.

But Gergana left her home village. Do you wonder what happened to her? She went to the Czech Republic. She found that handsome guy. They got married. They had a grand wedding. Now they have two boys and they often write to us.

Ivan stayed in the village to train the children eager to learn and receive knowledge. Even the elderly people wanted to get educated. His brother Iliya stayed at home too. He is now in love with a young girl, she is not bad but is not as beautiful as he is.

The two brothers often travel around Europe. Sometimes on excursions with the pupils, sometimes to visit Gergana. But all three of them remembered the Queen's words and are striving to preserve the values and beauties of Europe.

*StelaYancheva, 13, Bulgaria*

## Journey by drone and bread which costs one lev

It's strange. I haven't been at school, I haven't woken up early but I went to bed so tired. And today is Saturday! All day I was on the tablet and I relaxed playing computer games. I went to bed too early- as my Granny says , " You go to bed with the sun." I'm lying in the bed, thinking of my things and I was growing sleepy . Suddenly, I recalled that mum had told me to buy a loaf of bread. She had left me one lev. I jumped out of the bed. I should buy a loaf of bread. How can I get to the shop? It's dark outside.

Unexpectedly, I heard a voice , " Come, jump here, I will help you to find out some bread!

I looked through the window and I saw that there was a drone in front of the house.

How funny! I couldn't help seeing the drone from a short distance. There was written , " Journeys by a magic drone- only to order." I jumped in. It seemed that the drone was waiting for me.

We flew. The nearest shop was closed and we continued flying. While we were flying, I saw land which looked like a boot. Italy! We arrived so fast. I thought it was wonderful that I had a drone and I could fly everywhere. I 'm sure that in the future it's going to be the most important way for travelling. We landed at a drone parking lot next to a bakery. I entered there and said , " Hello! Can I have a loaf of bread, please!" The seller smiled at me and offered me focaccia. "One euro, please!"

What could I do! I had no euro, I only had one Bulgarian lev. I turned around and went to the exit. I heard seller's voice, " Hey, little boy , come back! I am sure that you are hungry. I will give you one focacha." I said , " Thank you very much" and I left. I tried the focaccia , I liked it. Unfortunately, my father wouldn't have approved this kind of bread. He likes our, the Bulgarian bread! My father always says that the bread is the most important food. But there wasn't other bread.

The drone was waiting for me. We flew again. The sea was shining under the moonlight and everything was so calmly. Europe was clearly visible. Our Europe!

Our teacher often tells us that Europe is beautiful and variegated. Europe is a community of people who help each other, they help others when they are into trouble. I couldn't understand this so far. I thought that already I could understand! This travelling by drone helped me to learn the lesson for Europe.

I am glad that I speak English. Otherwise I couldn't understand the people in Europe.

Meanwhile, the drone let down. We landed at a small town in Spain which was bathed in light. We stopped in front of a bakery. I asked for a loaf of bread. They suggested me tortilla. It cost one euro.

I had only my Bulgarian lev, I couldn't buy that tortilla. Down in the mouth I went to the exit. The seller was very kind. He gave me one tortilla. I was so grateful to him. I ate a piece of tortilla and I liked it very much. I liked the people as well- they were peaceful, smiling and sunny. I knew that one day , I would come back.

Then I was on my way by my Bulgarian drone. Next stop was Portugal. We landed at a small town. At one local bakery I wanted to buy a loaf of bread. The baker said, " We haven't any wheaten bread left but we have sweet maize bread instead. It costs one euro." One euro again. I refused it with my sad smile. Why I couldn't find the bread like ours, the Bulgarian one? The

baker noticed my sadness. He sliced a piece of this sweet maize bread, he wrapped it in paper and smiling at me, he wished me a nice trip. "You are very kind", I said.

I would like the sellers in Bulgaria treat me like that. They shouldn't ask me who my parents are.

I came back on my drone and we flew to Bulgaria. We almost reached my home town when I felt that somebody touched me. "Alex, did you buy any bread?" It was my father. Was he here with me, on the drone? Or was that all just a beauty sleep? But it was real.

I got up and rushed to the kitchen. I wanted to tell my father for my journey. I saw on the kitchen table, wrapped in paper three things-focaccia, tortilla and maize bread. My father was eating happily and patted me on the back. "You have bought sweet-smelling bread. Where did you find it out?", he said.

I felt relief. I would like in the future there will be variety in the shops, even in small towns and villages. I have a dream - all the people to help each other, to help those who are into troubles, all of us to be united. I would like everything in the shops to be sold for only one euro. I hope that in other countries they will sell our, the Bulgarian bread.

My father's question! What could be my answer? Could I tell him that I had travelled in Europe to buy some bread? He wouldn't have believed me. He would have said that computer games had embarrassed me a little bit. That's why I said quietly, "Magic, dad, Magic!"

*Alexander Ivanov, 10, Bulgaria*

## Travelling in the future

I'm James. I'm in the 6th grade and I'm not an obedient boy at all. Something unusual happened to me. I'd like to tell you about it.

I and my friend Nick used to go to the old bee- garden. It is called like that because it had inhabited by bees before, but I don't want to stray from the subject. The old bee-garden is our favourite place for play. In fact, this place is a building which is fifty meters long and it is half-destroyed inside.

There are no doors and windows as well. When I and Nick want to have fun we always go there. One day, when we went there again, we noticed something new. A plank was propped on the wall. The plank was as big as a door. Nick rushed to the plank and removed it aside. Suddenly, hidden behind the plank, a door appeared in front of us.

"A door," shouted Nick.

"I noticed," I replied.

"Shall we enter," Nick asked nervously. "What can be there?"

"No need of asking," I said. " We are going in."

No sooner said than done. When we entered we saw a room which was bigger than the bee-garden itself. Don't ask me why hadn't we seen this so far? In this room there was something which looked like a spaceship. Its size and kind were as Mercedes. We both became dumb.

"A space shuttle," I spluttered. "We are jumping in and no objections"

"But ...if...",mumbled Nick.

"We are jumping in," repeated I. He wanted to say something but he but he declined and we rushed to the space shuttle. Inside the space shuttle was as a car. We sat down and made ourselves comfortable when we noticed a key on the control board.

"You are thinking of the same thing that I am thinking of, aren't you?" I asked.

"Shall we slip out?" said Nick.

I looked at him sceptically and turned the key. Then everything went wrong. The space shuttle didn't start , it just teleported. We landed in a strange town. All around was unknown , strange and unexplainable.

"But ... what..." , I tried to ask.

"Jaaaaaaames," shouted Nick. "Look at"

He was pointing a sign where this was written:

WELCOME! HAVE A NICE TIME IN EUROPE IN 2072!

Nick looked at me in amazement. "We went fifty years forward in the future!"

"Yes," I said. "We are here. How about seeing the sights?"

"OK," agreed Nick.

After a short tour of Europe I found out that all people speak in the same language. But it was a language that I hadn't heard before. I also saw that there weren't any buildings of flats. There were houses- small, nice with glass roofs and lawns in front of them. I noticed that instead of cars there were space shuttles- Mercedes, BMW and some other brands that I didn't know. I noticed that all space shuttles were electrical. How did I realize this fact? They didn't have exhaust-pipes.

The streets were extremely clean. There were too many parks and the trees were very big and some of them I hadn't seen before. The people who were walking in these parks were greeting each other smiling and raising their hats. They were speaking in language that I didn't know. Those people even didn't know each other. They were different- rich and poor; black, yellow and white.

They were calm and happy. It seemed to me that the only correct word for all that was - community.

Europe- many- sided and diversity but at the same time united. This Europe was unknown for me, Europe of the future! I'd like to say that what I saw I liked it very much. While I was looking round, a woman passed by us saying, "Excusimuer!"

"I beg your pardon!" I was puzzled.

"Sit transit ni muo fonty!" said the woman.

"I am sorry, but I don't speak European language." I managed to say.

The woman looked me suspiciously and went on her way. At that moment a bear came near to us. Nick turned white by fear.

"In Europe bears walk around! Since when?" ejaculated Nick.

"I don't know but I like it." I replied.

Then one girl, probably Chinese, came near to the bear and caressed it. The bear purred as a cat and licked girl's hand. Obviously, wild animals were walking freely in future Europe.

"Oh, too much adrenaline," murmured Nick.

"Let's go over there!" I pointed one playing club.

We went there and it was a big fun. There were playing machines, enormous monitors, many 3D games, water slides and more, and more... It was the dream of my life. The best thing was that we could use all that absolutely free. When sometime later we left the playing club, in the street we saw the same girl, who was still playing with the bear. Then this girl came nearer to me.

"Wake up!" said the girl.



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I startled and jumped. It was my elder sister. She was holding my arms and shaking me.

“Get up! You are late!” she shouted at me.

Later in the car she asked me , “ You were talking in your sleep about some space shuttles and bears. Tell me about this!”

“It’s a long story but very beautiful. I wish it would happen in the future. You just drive. I’m going to tell you on the way.” I said.

*Marian Stoyanov, 11, Bulgaria*

### **Queen Elisabeth in Sardinia**

A youth group meets to decide where to go on a school trip. He puts agrees and decides to go to England, specifically in London. Since the project is funded by the European Union and Britain decided not to keep more than one part, students who plan to go by Queen Elizabeth to persuade her to return and be part of the new Europe.

Pupils, who arrived in London range from the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Before going to the palace, pupils speak with the English teacher to be to suggest questions in perfect English. Pupils come to the palace, excited, and meet Queen Elizabeth. One of the pupils said: just boys, is a useless thing! Not be able to convince her. Queen Elizabeth, however, responds: You go ahead and talk. In the choir, all the students are turning to the queen and say: So you understand Italian? and she said, nodding her head, turned to them and said: yes youngsters. "Well, Your Majesty," they scream in chorus boys and continues: Be prepared, queen, we will bring in Sardinia.

The Queen or the peace and part with the guys. Pupils and Queen arrive in Sardinia. The Queen of England remains amazed by the beauty of the island and addressing the young people makes this statement: Guys, I go back to Europe to continue to see this land.

*Asia Murgia, 14, Italy*

## A sea of connections

Pau had grown up in a village on the Mediterranean coast. He liked to approach the pier where fishermen came, following an ancient tradition, performing the daily dance of the final of the day full of energy and coordinated movements while unloading the prize of a day full of effort.

Seagulls, euphoric, approached the boats and took part of the show where lips and bills showed smiles full of delight; legs and wings moved the bodies involved in the situation; ocean and sky mingled on the horizon. Pau was happy.

He noticed how the elements, analyzed separately, could seem distant and unrelated, but took shape as a whole. In fact he used to think with melancholy how this landscape so well known would be if any of the elements that complemented interlacing could not attend it anymore. The scene that so fascinated who came to see it was dyed precisely from this diversity that, united, filled it with beauty.

But Pau not only was thrilled to see the familiar elements, but also dreamed. He liked to let his mind wander as sailing on the blue moving. And traveled to a distant community. A community united by the same sea, the same seagulls flying free from town to town, looking for fish that swam ocean beyond.

He imagined people like the people in his village. Perhaps with slightly different facial features, with a language that sounded strange to his ears. The smells, except for sea salt and the smell of the fish, also had a different touch. The streets of coastal town, despite being whitewashed, were given different uses. Maybe there were more children playing in the streets, perhaps plants hanging from balconies have different colors.

Or maybe it was the gestures that were exchanged, completely transforming the reality around him with his magic. In any case, Pau dreamed that his inhabitants loved those streets as fishermen did with the roads around him.

That is why Paul was filled with anxiety, confusion and inability when he saw the images that appeared on television in the recent months. Everyone spoke about it, and on the radio he listened to the interviews, the experiences of those who had gone to a distant place (or a close one) in search of the truth. He remembered the great migrations result of a history not so far between peers of his country but also the neighboring countries.

Migrations based on a shared hope, running away from a terror that persecuted them. Migrations that grew, as hunger reduced the energy of those marching in powder fluttering in the slightest breeze. Migration as a flower in the middle of a field calcined, that erected symbols born of a desperation that seemed endless.

He suffered. The people he used to imagine offshore, sitting from the pier, also loved the people around them. They coexisted with the seagulls, with the ocean fauna and mountains of the area. They cared for the education of their children; they read them stories in the evenings and sing songs in the mornings. They felt safe and comfortable in their homes, happy with the memories that were stored there day by day.

He startled to think that those water that appeared bucolic in his landscape could be the fate of miseries, sufferings and unimaginable horrors between the calm sea. He was mad. The eyes that

watched the sea and dreamed of a community far away, but so close at the same time, were filled with impotence.

Where was dignity? Where was the solidarity of those who see the suffering of others? Perhaps for fear, perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps even old misgivings result of a biased story. The rights and dignity of people had been buried, relegated to the second row.

Pau was suddenly filled with strength. With the complicity between birds and fishermen. With the waves that with its swing could through, build, unite. No, the European he wanted was the one who understood the subtle identity differences full of beauty. The Europe that values the multifaceted ability of those who are part of her, and recognises their skills. The Europe that focuses on the people who make her, without which it would remain an empty concept without meaning.

Exactly Europe makes sense to understand the link between the people and the people who shared that same sea, mountains, history and hopes for the future. That union to fight the past horror, the present horror.

It was necessary to raise the face, stare, mend differences, intertwine stories. But above all, participate: from the own history, and the common present.

*Marina Miguel Llinares, 24, Spain*

### The loveliness of the beautiful young woman

The snapshot of Europe's greatness are the words that sound in several ways, which are pronounced by different melodies, by each trait of the imagination of each artist, that transformed Europe's future into a closer, more united place, the beauty of its face is so delicate, like a dandelion flower, in each community it transforms the shadow and the light in a perfect dance of colours, in this movement voiced by the expression of the past that turned it into a more beautiful young woman, calm and serene, but it is from the past that her beautiful hair grows which crosses her face closing the ears, leaning forward, the men that see her look at her in a multifaceted way, but in her clear eyes she has always been one, because in the depths of her heart her wrinkles never made a division, it is the portrait of a beautiful young woman who walks next to the river, appreciating the nature around her, those who live there are enchanted with the songs of her melodies, because the picture is the memory of somebody who dreamed but never approached her because beauty has to be contemplated from a distance for it to grow, because it is with greed that we suffocate her and lose her as so many other times.

*Fernando Cruz*