

NO ONE IS BIGGER THAN THE BREAD

**The interview with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emiliya Velikova
was conducted by Mrs. Veneta Tsoneva-Velikova**



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emiliya Velikova is Erasmus+ and CEEPUS coordinator, researcher, lecturer in the fields of Education, Mathematics Education, Mathematics; Head of the GeoGebra Institute of Ruse, former Faculty Vice Dean; coordinator of 2 master's degree courses in Education and Information Technologies, supervisor of PhDs; author/co-author/editor of 17 books and 141 papers; editorial board member of 3 education journals; plenary lecturer of many international conferences and congresses on education; visiting lecturer to many universities in Europe; Vice president of DANET, Board member of the International Group on Mathematical Creativity and Giftedness.

What is the connection of Bulgarians with bread?

Bulgaria lies at the great crossroads between East and West. Therefore, the Bulgarians are very hospitable. It is believed that there should be bread and water for everyone who knocks on the door, even if there is no bread and water for the hosts at that moment. We say, "No one is greater than bread." This is the reason why every official or family holiday begins with the serving of bread, which the guest or the oldest in the home breaks and gives to everyone.

Are there different types of bread associated with traditions and rituals in Bulgaria?

In Bulgaria, we have many holidays, as well as various occasions for gathering of relatives and friends - childbirth, naming a child, engagement, weddings, birthdays and name days, Sirni Zagovezni, Easter, Christmas Eve, Christmas and more. They are always associated with bread, which presents traditions and customs as part of people's lives.

Mrs. V. Koleva-Avramova, for example, has long been creating beautiful bread for various Bulgarian traditions. After retiring, she has free time and begins to practise this art - to create beautiful bread associated with specific holidays to bring joy to people.

How do you maintain the traditions of bread for the holidays?

We always try to preserve traditions and pass them on to future generations. A good practice is that the Municipality of Slivo Pole with Mayor Mr. Valentin Atanasov supports such kinds of initiatives. An annual bread competition under the motto "Give a sign of friendship between ethnicities in Slivo Pole Municipality and along the river Danube" is organised by Mrs. Veska Uzunova, the President of the Union of Pensioners for all ethnic groups of the Municipality - Bulgarians, Roma, Tatars, Pomaks, and Russians. The event aims to show people that bread unites people and it also exhibits different customs, cultures, and traditions of many ethnic groups in the country and in the other countries of Europe. It contributes to fostering a peaceful and solidary community.

Every year P. Stoyanova from the Cultural House of the village Babovo organises the Festival “Mulled rakiya and sauerkraut soup from the old days”. Every organisation can participate with a table that presents the bread and the food of one celebration – New Year, St. Nikolaus day, etc.

K. Marinova, the President of the Club Kalina, and H. Marinova the President of the Union of Pensioners – Ruse region organise the Day of the Christian Family with a Quiz “No one is bigger than the bread”.

Which is the most famous bread in Bulgaria?

This is a specific bread that Bulgarians love very much. This is a “**Banitsa**”. Every host or chef has a hidden recipe. But the most famous is the "Banitsa with Lucky Charms for the New Year. Banitsa is a traditional Bulgarian bread on the table of Bulgarians which is known and loved by everyone in the country. It is a meal prepared with pastry crusts, eggs, yogurt and white Bulgarian cheese (sirene) which is baked in the oven.

Banitsa is a must on the festive table for the New Year’s Eve dinner. On that day Bulgarians put in it some *lucky charms or fortunes* (small sheets of paper with written wishes for happiness, health, and success throughout the New Year). They put *coins* and sometimes a piece of *dogwood branch* with a bud which symbolises wealth. They put the fortunes in the pastry. Then everybody in the house takes a piece of the Banitsa and the lucky charm in it determines the upcoming year. There should be enough pieces of the meal for everyone in the house + 1 additional piece.