

## Global Spotlights

# Bulgarian Society of Cardiology: 50 years on

Vassil Traykov <sup>1,\*</sup>, Kiril Karamfiloff<sup>2</sup>, and Assen Goudev <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Clinic of Cardiology, Acibadem City Clinic University Hospital Tokuda, Sofia, Bulgaria; <sup>2</sup>Clinic of Cardiology, University Hospital 'Alexandrovska', Medical University-Sofia, Bulgaria; and <sup>3</sup>Clinic of Cardiology, Tsaritsa Yoanna Hospital, Medical University-Sofia, Bulgaria

## 'Community is the foundation of success'

This quote by Kirsten Jones highlights the vital role professional communities play in uniting individuals, who share similar goals and face common challenges. National Cardiac Societies (NCSs) exemplify this, bringing together experts in cardiovascular medicine and fostering development and collaboration. As crucial members of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), NCSs take a major part in disseminating ESC recommendations, guidelines, and initiatives across their respective countries.

The Bulgarian Society of Cardiology (BSC), a devoted member of the ESC family, has always been dedicated to fight cardiovascular disease (CVD) and promote cardiovascular health in a country which has one of the highest burdens of CVD in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

This year marks the BSC's 50th anniversary, an important milestone to celebrate along the journey but also to look back at BSC's initiation and achievements over the years.

## The Bulgarian Society of Cardiology over the years

The BSC traces its origins to the spring of 1974, when the Society of Cardiology and Rheumatology, operating under Bulgaria's Association of Medical Scientific Societies, hosted its first National Conference on Cardiology and Rheumatology. The organizing committee was led by Prof. V. Tsonchev and included pioneering physicians who laid the foundation for the BSC. One of the major focuses of the conference was rheumatic heart disease, then prevalent in the country.

Over the years, the Society of Cardiology and Rheumatology evolved, holding regular meetings and later rebranding as the Bulgarian Society of Cardiology and Rheumatology. A pivotal moment came in 1980 when it joined the ESC NCS family, even while under the constraints of the Iron Curtain. In the challenging post-communist years, the society introduced a structured leadership model, including

two-year presidential terms with President-Elect and Past President roles, ensuring continuity and sustainable growth (Figure 1). Today, the BSC stands as one of the most advanced medical societies in Bulgaria.

## Educational and scientific activities

A key mission of the BSC is to disseminate knowledge. The society actively translates and distributes ESC guidelines in Bulgarian, making them accessible to healthcare professionals and publishing them on its website ([bgcardio.org](http://bgcardio.org)). This ensures delivery of high-quality care, in line with the latest European recommendations.

The BSC prioritizes training young physicians, through symposia and courses, that keep fellows and residents updated on advancements in the field of cardiovascular medicine. It is also actively involved as a partner in preparing the European Exam in Core Cardiology, which an increasing number of young cardiologists and fellows in training pass, with the active support of the BSC. To further support young researchers, the BSC offers research grants, fostering innovation and development within the community.

The BSC organizes diverse scientific events alone or in collaboration with partner societies. These range from topic-focused symposia to large-scale, internationally recognized meetings. The society's biennial National Congress is its flagship event, attracting around 1500 participants and marking the conclusion of each term.

## The 18th National Congress of Cardiology

The 18th National Congress of Cardiology, held in October 2024 in Plovdiv, celebrated the end of the 2022–24 term. This event adopted a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating perspectives from gastroenterology, nephrology, neurology, sleep medicine, and psychiatry into cardiovascular medicine. It also addressed important broader topics, such as the legal aspects of medical care in Bulgaria.

\* Corresponding author. Tel: +35924034606, Email: [vtraykov@yahoo.com](mailto:vtraykov@yahoo.com)

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**Figure 1** The Executive Board of the BSC for the term 2022–24 during the regular expert meeting in December 2023 along with two of the three BSC staff members

Distinguished keynote speakers included Prof. Thomas F. Lüscher, Prof. Filippo Crea, Prof. Petar Seferovic, Prof. Josep Brugada, Prof. Michiel Rienstra, and many others who presented state-of-the-art talks in their fields. The congress featured joint sessions with some ESC associations, such as the Heart Failure Association and a session with the *European Heart Journal* that highlighted impactful regional research, and offered guidance on publishing in high-ranking journals.

A notable session focused on the health impacts of air pollution, organized in collaboration with non-governmental organizations. For the first time, the BSC convened representatives from neighbouring NCSs to discuss regional cardiovascular health. Co-chaired by Prof. Béla Merkely from Hungary, this session underscored the region's disproportionately high CVD burden and the need for harmonized measures to combat it.

## Promoting cardiovascular health

Acknowledging Bulgaria's high CVD burden, the BSC has been at the forefront of promoting cardiovascular health. In 2021, the society joined the European Alliance for Cardiovascular Health (EACH) initiative, becoming one of the first to establish a National Alliance for Cardiovascular Health. By 2023, this alliance was enlarged to include 61 stakeholders who signed a memorandum supporting the creation of a National Cardiovascular Health Plan, demonstrating widespread societal commitment.

Bulgaria is now aligning with countries like Spain, Poland, and France in developing and implementing a National Plan for Cardiovascular Health.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, this process would not have been possible without the active collaboration and support of the ESC, EACH, and the World Heart Federation.

However, a critical next step remains: working closely with government authorities and the National Alliance to effectively finalize,

disseminate, and implement the plan. The BSC is determined to lead these efforts to ensure a healthier future for Bulgaria.

## Conclusion

For 50 years, the BSC has played a pivotal role in advancing cardiovascular health and fostering the professional development of Bulgarian cardiologists. Through education, research, and collaboration, the BSC continues to inspire progress and innovation, bringing Bulgaria closer to achieving sustainable improvement in cardiovascular health and better care for patients with CVD.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the Presidents and members of the Executive Board over the years. Special thanks to Prof. Ivan Gruev, the Scientific Secretary of the BSC 2022–24 and BSC President-Elect, for his enormous efforts to put together the scientific programme of the 18th National Congress of Cardiology.

## Declarations

### Disclosure of Interest

V.T. reports honoraria for presentations and proctorship as well as travel grants from Abbott, Astra Zeneca, Biotronik, Boehringer Ingelheim, Johnson and Johnson, Medtronic, Novartis, Pfizer, and Servier; institutional research grant from Abbott and clinical trial honoraria from Janssen. K.K. has nothing to declare. A.G. received honoraria for presentations, clinical trials honoraria as well as travel grants from AstraZeneca, Novartis, NovoNordisk, Amgen, GedeonRichter, Egis, and Pfizer.

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