

SHORT

ARTICLES

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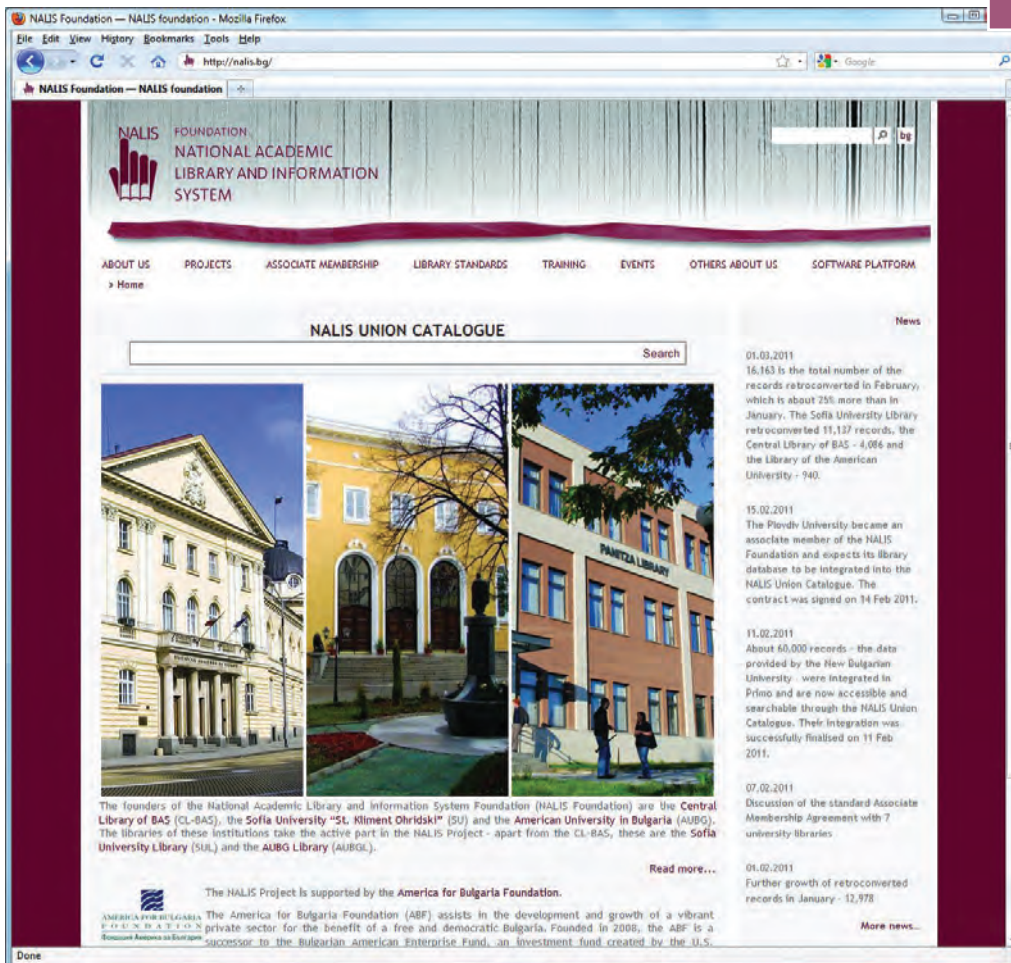
GATES

The Online Union Library Catalogue in Bulgaria

Every student, university professor, scholar, scientist or simply active patron of any bigger library in Bulgaria does not have very pleasant memories of the time and effort lost while looking for a title in a number of card catalogues, often located in different buildings. Even more unpleasant is to think of such an activity after having worked in established foreign libraries where the search for printed texts or archival units, the loan and all the stages of a circulation need much less time and effort, since many of the services are electronic and onli-

ne. Now Bulgarian readers are part of an increasingly digitised culture and require adequate services. The project entitled "National Academic Library and Information System" (NALIS), initiated by the foundation bearing the same name and funded by the America for Bulgaria Foundation (ABF), begins answering this need.

Dincho Krastev, Director of the Central Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (CL-BAS) and later the Executive Director of the NALIS Foundation, was the author of this



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project. Such an initiative was not surprising at all, since during his leadership CL became the first Bulgarian library with a website (1997) and with a functioning online catalogue (2003). Apart from CL-BAS, the other two founders of the NALIS Foundation were the Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski (SU) and the American University in Bulgaria (AUB), who also took part in the preparation of the five-year (2009-2014) strategy for library digitisation.

What are the main goals, the first achievements and the future perspectives before the NALISF team? Their principal purpose is to develop a union library and information system as well as a catalogue register of the major academic (yet not only academic) stacks, and to make this union catalogue available online through a single portal. The results of the first stage - integration of catalogue information from the founding libraries (of BAS, of SU and of AUB) - are already reality (see the NALISF website www.nalis.bg/).

Described quite pragmatically, if a person is interested in which of those three¹ libraries a book, periodical or article is located, they type a keyword or phrase in the NALIS Union Catalogue's search field² and receive the search results within seconds, moreover supplied with the call number at the respective sublibrary. One search is enough to retrieve information from the included library catalogues, from their subscribed databases and their digital collections (still under construction). In addition to this basic information, some refinement options are given on the left-hand side of the screen as well as suggestions for further searches (by author or by a keyword related to the subject). Moreover, a registered patron can contribute an abstract for the item, print or send it via e-mail, add it to a bibliography, and more; these are only some of the services offered³. The opportunity to order library items online is just a question of time for BAS and SU.

The second stage of the project is the gradual expansion of the online union catalogue with bibliographic information from other university libraries as well as from those public libraries which are technologically prepared for that. The first associated libraries are those of the New Bulgarian University, the VUZF University and the Union of Architects in Bulgaria. To build up such a network on the national level means to integrate the information resources of the institutions involved, to grant access to those resources and services, to transform the existing academic communication network, and to develop the libraries themselves.

It is no exaggeration to say that the NALIS Union Catalogue - in its earliest stage when just information from the founding libraries is included - is functioning quite successfully and that the results from the integrated search of authors, topics and subjects are very impressive. It is also important to point out that certain rare and valuable books have also been stored in the database. The items under consideration are from the early 19th century: the first digitised book is Ogleдалo ("Mirror") and is freely accessible together with some periodicals of the Bulgarian National Revival - namely *Tsarigradski Vestnik* and *Dunavski Lebed*. Just for comparison, on the website of the National Library in Sofia it is stated that the books described in its online catalogue, are not dated earlier than 1984.

Since there are quite an impressive number of items to be published in the NALIS portal, the process of so-called retrospective conversion is still running. Retrospective conversion means the transformation of the old bibliographic records (printed on catalogue cards) into electronic ones (also known as machine-readable). At NALISF the process started in June 2010, and for 7 months the founding libraries converted a total of 45 468 records⁴, which increased the total number of bib-



biographic records in the NALIS Union Catalogue to 653 159 by the end of the year. Although this may not be an impressive number for a bigger European library, consider that in Bulgaria it was done almost from scratch.

In order to achieve the desired effect of making users satisfied with the online search of literature, the NALIS team has gone through several key stages in the integration and assimilation of new technologies. After obtaining the necessary hardware and the package of software modules by Ex Libris, employees of the founding libraries were trained to operate with the modules necessary to create and maintain the national library and information system.

Among the adopted high-tech software products were Primo, Aleph, DigiTool, MetaLib and SFX, each of which is implemented in a number of established libraries around the globe.

Another challenge faced by NALISF is the development and adoption of a uniform standard for bibliographic description which is to be fully appropriate for machine-readable cataloguing. The choice has fallen on MARC

21, already applied in the information systems of institutions like the British Library and the US Library of Congress. NALISF has provided the Bulgarian library society with translations of the two basic documents related to MARC 21, namely Understanding MARC Bibliographic and Understanding MARC Authority that contain detailed instructions on how to create bibliographic and authority records as well as some directions on their structuring and ways in which computers manage to find data through the respective tags⁵.

Besides, there are three dictionaries freely accessible on the NALIS website, which, although in progress, aim at helping librarians to get easily acquainted with all the novelties in the library and information systems. The first dictionary - *Online Multilingual Dictionary of MARC 21 Terms* - offers translation of MARC 21 related terms in 5 languages (apart from the original English terms); the second - *Online Glossary of Bulgarian Library Terms* - provides key explanations of library terms in Bulgarian, and the third one describes some acronyms related to library and information theory and practice.





Integrating Bulgarian Library Resources was the name of the NALISF international forum held in Sofia on 23-24 September 2010. Its purpose was not only to gather library and information specialists and make them communicate their experience and ideas, but also to present the results of the NALIS activity before the Bulgarian society and open the NALIS Union Catalogue to the public.

What an active library user might wish is that more libraries share the enthusiasm, optimism and energy with which the NALIS team works in the project. There is no question that if the National Library in Sofia (NL) joins - and efforts have been made in this respect - each side will benefit: the NALIS Union Catalogue will be enriched with an enormous and useful pool of items, and NL will be granted access to an effective solution to managing their huge holdings. Moreover, all patrons will acquire easy access to integrated library resources.

It is worth mentioning here that through its activities the foundation wishes to convey a particular message - that keeping the qualification of the library employees high and adequate to modern conditions is a no less im-

portant task than the optimisation of the adopted software products. Let's hope that the future stages of the NALIS project will further strengthen the integrated library services to the Bulgarian patrons and will improve their quality to a global scale, while enriching the catalogue's content.

- 1 The process was developed after the completion of this article some of the associate members' databases have been already added to the NALIS Union Catalogue.
- 2 This field is placed on the top of the NALISF homepage and on the Sofia University Library website. www.libsu.uni-sofia.bg/primosearch.html.
- 3 For instance, if the library item which is searched for has its table of contents and/or an abstract in Amazon.com, there will be a direct link to them. These options are all part of the Primo Software product by Ex Libris.
- 4 See the NALISF Annual Report at www.nalis.bg/about_us/annual-reports-2/2010-godishen-1-en.pdf.
- 5 The translation of the whole MARC Bibliographic Format is ongoing and will be published online by the end of the year.



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Photo by Sabina Aneva