

Global Partnerships Podcast Series

Host: Ted Hart | President & CEO, CAF America

Guests: Elitsa Barakova | Chief Executive Director, BCause

Announcer: Learn how to take your caring and giving further with the *Caring and Funding* Podcast powered by CAF America. CAF America, America's leader in cross-border philanthropy helps corporations, foundations, wealth advisors, and individuals who wish to give internationally and with enhanced due diligence in the United States. Through its industry-leading grants management program and philanthropic advisory services, CAF America helps donors amplify their impact and ensure their gifts are made in a safe and effective manner.

This *Caring and Funding* Podcast is dedicated to these donors and the charities they support. Our guests are leaders in their fields who join us to share tips for success and stories that inspire. Our host is Ted Hart, the CEO of CAF America. After the show, you can find all our podcasts at cafamerica.org on iTunes and now just say, "Alexa play C-A-F America" on Tune In. Now welcome the host of CAF America's *Caring and Funding* Podcast, Ted Hart.

Ted Hart: Welcome to this special edition of CAF America's *Caring and Funding* Podcast. This is our *Global Partnership* series. Our global partnerships enable carefully chosen teams around the world to bring together the very best of talent and strengths. In today's world, philanthropy often moves at the speed of the internet even if human condition has not yet learned to heal, or grow, or change, or rebuild, or a host of other things that philanthropy can and will address at the same lightning speed.

CAF America's global partnerships enable us to bridge those great divides by bringing to the American donor the very best of philanthropic expertise and services on the ground in countries around the world. Through this podcast series, we introduce our listeners, our donors, to partners we collaborate with, and partners who collaborate with us in, making it possible for the long arc of history, that long arc of philanthropic change to bend a little faster with much more assurance and with the full regulatory compliance, risk management, and regulatory compliance you have come to rely on from CAF America.

Today as part of this special series of the *Caring and Funding* Podcast it is my pleasure to introduce you to Elitsa Barakova, Executive Director of BCause Foundation. BCause is a member of the CAF Global Alliance and our partner in Bulgaria. BCause provides companies and donors unparalleled expertise in directing philanthropic support to important impactful charitable causes in Bulgaria. Their work helps with the financial and organizational strengthening of civil society organizations and public institutions such as schools, libraries, and museums.

Since 2014, the BCause Foundation has helped CAF America's funded Rinker Center for Entrepreneurship and Training set up to promote education, lifelong learning, and support entrepreneurship and business development training in Bulgaria. BCause Foundation manages various funds to streamline one-off donations, tailored community investment, corporate programs, and simple fundraising tools for individuals to give through online platforms, text messaging, and payroll giving.

The beneficiaries range from urgent medical needs to proactive programs investing in social enterprises and employment facilitation. Drawing on 25 years of experience in philanthropic giving, BCause will share its knowledge and foresight, and fundraising know-hows for nonprofits and social enterprises according to changing trends in philanthropy. Welcome here to the *Caring and Funding* Podcast, Elitsa Barakova, Chief Executive of the BCause Foundation. Thank you for joining us today.

Elitsa Barakova: Hello Ted, and I'm really glad and very happy to join today.

Ted: Elitsa, I've really enjoyed my time visiting with you in Bulgaria and I have to say that there are a few people that I know around the world who have their country so totally wired for philanthropy as you do in Bulgaria. In your own words, what really lies at the heart of BCause?

Elitsa: BCause is a truly Bulgarian organization. I would say that the heart of BCause is the team and its partners. In the heart of the team and the partners lies the passion, the notion of a more developed civil society in Bulgaria, a passion and a vision about the future where philanthropy is a part of our everyday life and we are able to enjoy education, culture, art; which are supported and thriving because of our meaningful collaboration with these institutions.

I must say that I've been with the organization for nearly 25 years and there was an immense development since then. I was so happy to witness civil society spread; how different organizations came into existence. Some of the very first things like the first daycare center for children with disabilities, the first foundation for elderly, the first environmental organization has been set up during these days. BCause then BCAF, were very happy to be witnessing all of that development that led to the really vibrant civil society which exists right now.

Ted: Elitsa, you have been involved with so many different changes, you're also involved with two government groups, one in corporate social responsibility and another on social economy. Can you help us understand what kind of influence those two involvements give to you in the social sector?

Elitsa: Yes, during all these years, BCause has been very much engaged with the development of a supportive environment for the organizations, for the givers so that they can really implement their missions, help people, help communities grow. The legislation of NGOs has been developed and we may say now it's more than legislation that allows people to come together and do meaningful things but still, there's a lot of more things to be done. BCause has been part of the efforts of different groups and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. There is a group on social economy which was engaged in constructing a new regulation concerning social enterprises.

We're not so happy at the beginning but we are there, we will be putting forward the thoughts, the ideas and the needs for the social enterprises in Bulgaria, the organizations we work for, so that I hope with the start, with the new social economy act in Bulgaria, soon we will see a number of organizations getting better support, better infrastructure in the country to be developed. The CSR group, the group on philanthropy there, BCause and business associations, we try to help the government put forward the necessary measures which will lead to the enhancement within that area.

That's a communication issue that will never end, we need to get our government officials on board with our programs to get the real needs of the civil society and donors known to them. So, BCause will be there voicing these issues and I appreciate also the partnership of these institutions.

Ted: As we've seen around the world, Elitsa, we know that these things take time and working with government as you mentioned oftentimes it's a matter of having the opportunity to have that dialogue and provide that information. The experience of BCause in the many years of dialogue that the two have is an important involvement of BCause. As I said, I just marvel at just how many connections you have throughout the country.

Again, thinking of this particular podcast and our desire to make sure through our global partnership series that our American donors are able to connect with you to connect with BCause and to specifically understand the service offerings that BCause can help American donors on the ground in Bulgaria. Can you give us an understanding of some of the various services that American donors might like to use if they are thinking of having philanthropic projects in Bulgaria.

Elitsa: Yes, I'm sure that anyone who ever visited Bulgaria or a Bulgarian living in the US is eager to support. BCause gets inquiries about, "How can I make a positive change? Who shall I contact? Who are the trustworthy local organizations on the field in Bulgaria?" BCause is there to answer. For these years, we annually work with 100, 150, sometimes even more organizations annually. We organize trading, we fund them, we include them in different projects so we really know who does what in the field of social services, kids, the disabled, environment, recently social enterprise, so we are ready to channel and give the best advice to a potential donor and to protect the money that goes directly to those groups and people who really need will take it and turn it into development, into impact.

Ted: Of course, working with CAF America, one of our concerns and the work that we do with our donors is to make sure that the funds are used for the purpose in which it was given. This is one of the areas that we'll talk about a little bit later in this podcast and how BCause has made sure in Bulgaria that that is in fact the case. Elitsa, we're going to take just a very quick little break and when we come back, we're going to share with our listeners a story that you have, really quite a wonderful story about the work that BCause has with an American publicly traded software company called VMware. We'll be right back.

Announcer: Remember our podcasts and archives are always available 24 hours a day at cafamerica.org, on iTunes, or just say, "Alexa, play C-A-F America", on TuneIn. Now, back to the *Caring and Funding* Podcast and our host, Ted Hart.

Ted: Many of our listeners may be aware that the company VMware is an American publicly traded software company on the New York stock exchange. Dell technologies is a major software shareholder for this company and VMware provides cloud computing and visualization software and services. VMware Bulgaria has become one of the largest R&D sites for VMware in the Europe, Middle East and Asia area employing over 800 people world-class professionals.

From my understanding, Elitsa, is that VMware Employee Giving has a pretty good story and the work that BCause does in supporting their giving. Help us understand how you connect with VMware Employee Giving and how our American donors might be interested in learning more about that.

Elitsa: Bulgarian employees, VMware are very, very active most young people who are really willing to make contributions to society. We support VMware in organizing, volunteering and also helping different NGOs and medical cases. They often organize local fairs or meetings and presentations where smaller organizations can go and meet potential donors. Then the system of their responsible employer, VMware, together with CAF America allows these gifts that individual employees are making to the chosen campaign projects by them, they allow this to be matched.

So BCause is facilitating and enabling so that the match and the donations of VMware employees reaches the outermost beneficiaries in Bulgaria. We work with various groups and sick people also who get treatment, group school strife within the mission, and really the financial impact and the variety of beneficiaries chosen by the employee is impressive. I'm quite happy about BCause and CAF America and VMware; this amazing international partnership is based on good planning policies and the infrastructure of our two organizations.

Ted: Sounds like there's a lot of planning that goes into that. It's volunteerism, it's philanthropy, it's giving and it's really affecting a lot of lives.

Elitsa: Yes, it is and that it is also setting an example. As you mentioned, Bulgaria is a good place for other IT companies and it's really developing for the last 5, 10 years. VMware has set up an example that's good for their peers, and I'm sure other American companies will get employees who join from time to time. I should remind that all US taxpayers may give online to any Bulgarian beneficiary which is on the online platform platform.bg Because of the cooperation between BCause and CAF America, we can make these donations tax effective.

People who want to give to a Bulgarian smaller organization, first of all they can get an advice from BCause if they can select which one they want to support or if they have a specific NGO in mind, they can actually open their own campaign, shout their friends, come together on the platform at the platform.bg. Even smaller donations are acceptable so that many people coming together they can make a difference.

We witnessed a lot of Bulgarians in the US, their friends helping Bulgarian in different times of pain and crisis probably starting back in 2005 when the floods happened here, to the last example with the anti-COVID situation. Bulgarians living everywhere are really passionate about the country and its problems, and we are here to connect them to meaningful organizations and make sure what they want is happening.

Ted: Elitsa, thinking about this strong partnership that we have, any donor that wishes to give to a validated charity in Bulgaria can contact BCause if they like or their advisor at CAF America and from either country they can work with their advisor to advise the gift to their favorite Bulgarian charity.

That's the wonderful partnership between BCause and CAF America is that the donor can support the charity of their choice.

Elitsa: Yes, and that's happening all the time where in a process, CAF America is advising someone who is living in the US, and she will be making quite a substantial donation to the public libraries in Bulgaria. I'm really thrilled about this opportunity for this Bulgarian donor to make her dreams come true, to make the strife of her life come true in Bulgaria, and our two organizations working together. That's fantastic.

Ted: That's terrific. I want to thank you for bringing up the opportunity for larger donors to work together and make a difference in Bulgaria. I know that you're working with a large donor right now, can you help our listeners know how BCause supports larger donors in Bulgaria as well?

Elitsa: Yes, six years ago, we started working on a large donation, the result of a legacy of an American lady with Bulgarian origins who donated, left a lot of her financial and non-financial assets to CAF America with a recommendation to be used in Bulgaria. BCause carefully assessed and made a lot of projects improving the birthplace of this lady, a small village in the northeast part of Bulgaria. Right now, after these years of collaboration, we have renovated the library and community center in this village. We have a medical center, which is providing better service to the local elderly. We have new supportive activities in the cultural domain by local groups in the community center and among the youngsters.

We supported the school, provided better environments for the kids there, and supported all other small activities which the local people asked us to do. We were able to help with a part of the sewage and water pipes problem in the village. If you look back where we started now, we have renovated a lot of the village which is different and has a different face and hope also that the people will continue to use the legacy of the US donor by visiting every day these public institutions we helped reshape and transform.

We also, we're part of the financial projects; we were able to start the Rinker Center Entrepreneurship Program, hosted by our organization, by BCause. Rinker Center is looking for people with entrepreneurial ideas who want to change some parts of the way we live, with some meaningful impact on our life. We were able to support, for example, Nicola Rifus, who is a book writer, he writes game books. Nicola lives in a small village, but he was able, after four years, to make two big contracts with two Chinese editing book publishers.

His books, initially originally in Bulgaria, will be actually selling to Chinese kids quite soon. Some other examples of entrepreneurs who wanted to change the way we eat, the way we move, the way blind people work, so all these examples have been made possible because we started working with the finance given by the American woman who left money to CAF America and to Bulgarian projects.

Ted: It's been an incredible journey working with you for these many years on this large bequest and the incredible amount of work, regulations, the number of vendors that have worked to renovate this village and as you said, the number of lives who have been touched and careers that have been

advanced and now with the Rinker Center for Entrepreneurship and Training. This is really the true measure of philanthropy and the kind of partnerships that CAF America's global partnerships are able to bring in and really the measure of why we have this podcast series.

We just have a few moments left together here. I wanted to make sure that before we wrap things up today that you help us understand the main challenges that donors may need to know about in terms of the nonprofit sector and the legal environment that the civil society faces in Bulgaria that you can help them navigate as they're supporting their favorite charities.

Elitsa: Yes, so Bulgarian charities are underfunded all the time. They are lacking resources, so it's very difficult for them to keep professional staff. But, at the same time, their staff are some fantastic personal people who need and are able to do miracles with little support. Actually my colleagues at BCause, we are quite confident that people in US out there, who are Bulgarians, with Bulgarian friends or someone who, for some reason was touched by a Bulgarian story, the Bulgarian country; out there in the USA are people who are willing and meaning to support these excellent amazing people who work in the Bulgarian charities and my message to them is that we are here together, the two organizations in America, in Bulgaria to help with advice initially, with infrastructure, we're able to host both small and group donations or bigger donations as we talked about, so that these ideas, this wish to help Bulgaria come really true.

The organizations need some support. We are at the moment raising funds for crisis centers for women suffering domestic violence, these cases dramatically increased during the situation with the virus. We are raising funds for talented, skillful, young people without parents who, although they started quite badly, with their lives, having excellent results at schools and universities we're supporting them through scholarships.

There are so many examples, I can talk to the early morning about trustworthy, committed organizations and people who are transforming the people and communities around their organization. Who are transforming lives and we're very proud of helping them.

Ted: Elitsa, just finally, we often have corporations when they're looking to their philanthropy, they're also interested in corporate social responsibility. Is this an area that BCause can help facilitate?

Elitsa: Yes, of course, BCause is working with major multinational companies in Bulgaria and we have been also approached for individual gifts from US as well. So we are helping companies understand better the civil society landscape to see what the issues and the solutions which the organizations are working on. We're helping them either engage their employees or link their brands to a good cause and continuously support it.

We are organizing rebranding programs and competitions for them of specific community-based programs when they want to find specific partners and achieve goals within job geography areas or towards particular target groups. As I said, BCause for these years, we know more than 160 trustworthy organizations when we are able to provide links and good partnerships where and however needed.

Ted: Thank you Elitsa Barakova, Chief Executive of BCause Foundation, for joining me here on CAF America's *Global Partnership* series for being my guest here on the *Caring and Funding* Podcast.

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