



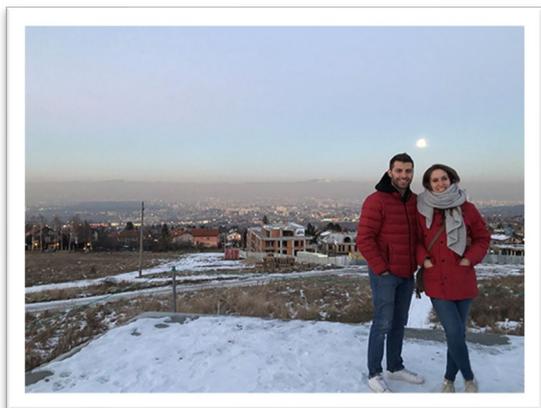
A very special year is coming to an end. And I hope that the new year ahead will allow us to move forward, progress, and find each other again!

After our 1st year in Bulgaria, we started 2020 with a precise plan of activities and trips. If Wim traveled half of the year in 2019, nothing really was meant to change during this year. I was planning to travel every two months, allowing me to go to Belgium regularly during this new year. But hey,... these were my plans and then arrived Covid 19, and all had to change.

So what happened on our side of Europe?

January 2020: Nice beginning of the year!

After having spent the 2019 end year celebrations in Belgium, we are back in Sofia on December 30, 2019.



On January 3, Victor and Alexane arrive for a few days visit, so we take this opportunity to spend three days at the Ski



resort of Borovets, 1 h 15 min from Sofia. There is enough snow, and they can take advantage of it to go skiing. Being in the mountains, full of snow, is amazing, and we really enjoy our stay, even though the days are relatively short.

February 2020: The discovery of a virus called Corona

In February, I spend a short week in Brussels, which allows me to see our daughters, Wim joining us following a business trip. I returned to Sofia on February 22. Three days later, my sister, who lives in Geneva, confirms that Switzerland will be shutting its borders because of the spread of the virus. In the days that follow, we realize that Belgium is also affected, like many countries in Europe.

March 2020: When we learn what *confinement* means

From the beginning of March, we see the spread of the virus in Southern Europe, Italy, Spain, and eventually everywhere.

Our company, whose Sofia branch employs most of the staff, organizes around 25 conferences per year across Europe. Conferences!!! This means that this part of the company business is shutting down on March 3 for an indefinite period (so more than 60% of our revenues!). I invite you to imagine what goes through Wim's head, who realizes that if we can no longer organize physical meetings, our company risks going bankrupt. And trust me, this prospect is not encouraging, and the situation calls for real action, if not reacting and certainly not for waiting.

On March 16, confinement is declared in Bulgaria as well as in Belgium. In the weeks that follow, we progressively see everything closing down. From March 16, our last day at the office, we are requested to stay home and start working remotely. A few weeks later, the confinement is strengthened, and we discover that we are not allowed anymore to leave Sofia. In May, when William dares to go for a bicycle ride, he is stopped twice, by the police, making sure no one crosses the city limits. Everything is closed except the stores that provide food, and therefore, surprisingly around us, a lot of small stores can stay open during the lockdown.



April & May 2020: save the company

From the beginning of March, Wim is intensively embarking on the solutions he must identify to save the company. The Sofia staff is maintained while 2 of the 3 employees of the Brussels office are put on furlough. The price of wages is so high in Brussels that this solution gives us a welcome break, not to drown our already very meager finances. On the other hand, since wages in Bulgaria are only taxed at 10%, we can keep everyone.

Our days are incredibly regular, and we find our new rhythm, even if it is a little strange. As the weeks progress, Wim begins to work more and more during the first hours of the night and go to bed at the beginning of the evenings. Everyone tries to participate in their own way, and Wim makes sure that part of the team is involved in thinking about how to pivot the company business model. But let's be honest, only Wim has the knowledge, skills, vision, and strategy to find the solution.

And then there is this surprising situation that we have never experienced Wim and I: living 24 hours/7days a week as well as working together. We didn't ask ourselves many questions; we just worked, each in our own way, finding a rhythm that could suit us every day. We are fortunate; we live in a very large apartment which allows

each of us to have an office and also for Wim to change places of work, failing to be able to travel across Europe every other week 😊

To spice up our life, and because Wim likes to take up challenges if possible several at the same time, he decides to embark in early May on a crazy project to change the European Commission in its way of supporting entrepreneurs throughout Europe. His professional background and knowledge in investment management in Europe make him an incredible expert and a strategist who can afford to make these officials and politicians think. It will take 2 months to finalize a document, during which time he will unfortunately not be able to stop his work in the company, even if he had to reduce it somewhat.



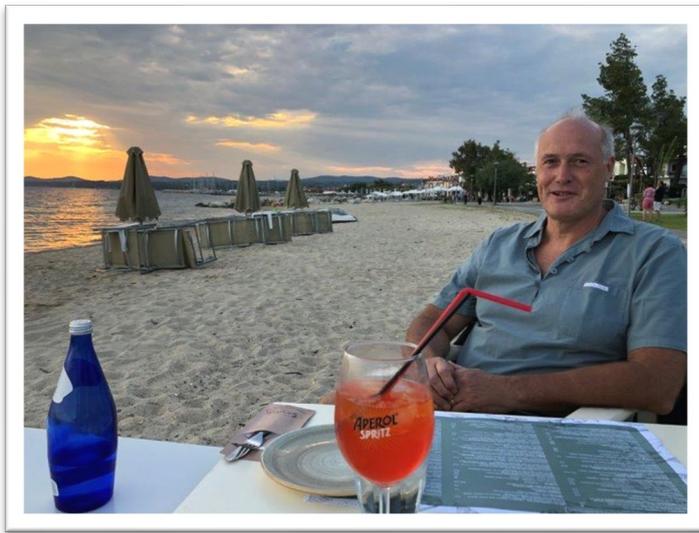
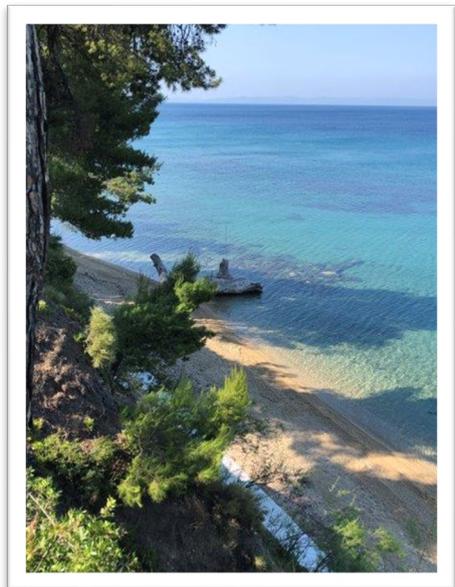
But work is one thing and we need a little bit of a break. So, early May, we decide get out at least once every weekend and go for walks on Mount Vitosha.



June 2020: a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel

Starting in June, we begin to see clients agreeing to sign contracts and consider other ways of meeting. We efficiently managed to set up virtual means to meet the same results & commitments as those delivered during conferences. And customers slowly decide to go for it. Like us, other companies have to find new ways to keep running, and everyone's resilience allows us to keep working even remotely.

At the end of June, we know that we had managed to get the company out of the difficult situation it was in March, and it is a



beautiful result after intense efforts during all these months.

We allowed ourselves a short 4-day weekend in Greece to get some fresh air, work a little away from our apartment, and above all, find the sun and the sea.

July & August 2020: at last, the holidays

After three weeks of work in July, we are finally planning our vacation, and we decide to go through Belgium for a few days before going down to Provence, our little family haven.

The day before departure, we decided to change the plans and go by plane; we will travel by train to Provence. The road trip we had planned might be complicated by the pandemic and the restrictions of the different countries we should drive through. And not having to cover 5,000 km in 1 month is eventually very comfortable.

In Belgium, we are able to see some friends and work a little longer, but, indeed, the distancing and contact bubble measures do not allow us to meet with our friends like we would use to. This is the first time this restriction has taken to its full extent, and I am very sad about it.



At the end of July we leave Brussel and go to Provence, where we have the opportunity to meet some family members. All chances to meet up for a few days are always welcome.

And above all, we spend our vacation with our daughters, who join us in Provence.

This was not our original plan, so we decided to change our habits and go for new activities. This is really great and the holidays spend together is a nice moment in this awkward year.

A few days in Nice before returning home and after a month absence, we were back in Sofia.



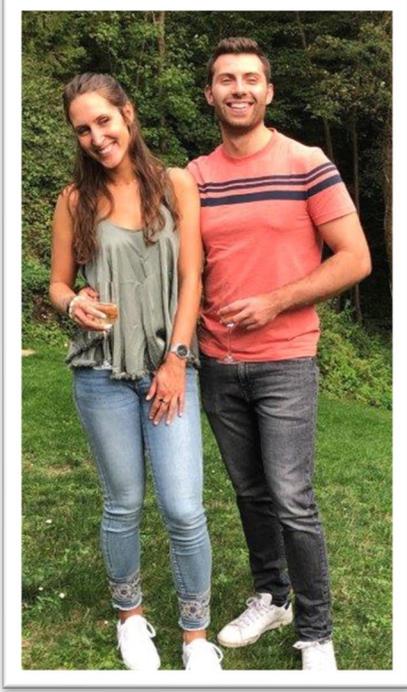
Since September: work, family, corona

Work resumes, still intense and still essential, but gradually with new contracts, satisfied customers and real new development prospects for the future.

Our efforts, Wim's determination and vision, the perseverance and tenacity that keep us progressing mean that we will end with a profit this year. This accomplishment is a great satisfaction for all.



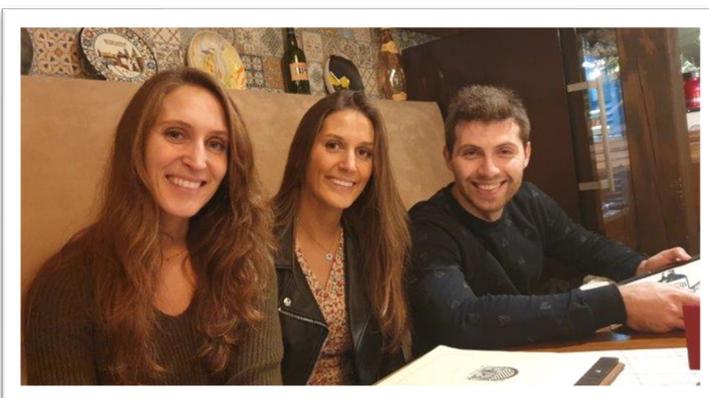
But we still take advantage of a few days in the beginning of September. We discreetly returned to Belgium and settled in for a few days at my brother Bernard and his partner Dourou's home. We are there to prepare a little birthday party for Alexane, who is celebrating her 30th birthday on September 11. She should have been in Nice to participate in a sports competition, the Ironman, but the Corona changed all the plans and this gave us a great opportunity to reunite to celebrate her.





In early November, even if the corona situation had deteriorated sharply in Belgium, even if just before coming Juline was contaminated and add the Covid 19 for about a week, Alexane, Victor, and Juline come to spend a few days in Sofia. And as they summed it up very well, during the five days of their visit, they were able to do everything they were no longer allowed to do in Belgium: go to the gym, to the swimming pool, to the restaurant, and in stores.

We also take a day off to go visit Plovdiv, and spend a really nice day there. 5 days, just to take all opportunities we can to be together. When will be the next time we can be together?



What a surprising year we have just gone through

While I spent the first half of 2020 working intensely for our company, bringing my skills and knowledge to help Wim in his endeavors, the second half of the year is allowing me to resume other activities, which are also close to my heart.

If living in Bulgaria has taken on a very different flavor this year, mainly following the consequences of the global pandemic, I am also aware of the immense luck that I have to end this year feeling confident in the future.

I dare say that for many reasons, this extraordinary situation that we went through, completely changing the way our life unfolded during the year, has been and is an amazing opportunity!

Wim stopped traveling overnight, spending half the year on business or other travel. For the first time and we learned to live together, 24h/7d. And we are doing really fine.

Arguably, he had the opportunity to run his company entirely differently from the way he has always done it. This opportunity is helping him realize the changes he could consider to improve the situation; change the outlook for the future while continuing to develop, ambitiously, his project to support entrepreneurs across Europe.

I certainly intend to continue to be available when I am asked for help, whether in a professional but also personal context, but I am also able to take the time to train myself, one of my great passions, to learn something new every day and develop a project. It is a fantastic luxury to have the opportunity to focus on what you love to do and not have to do a job every day, that isn't so exciting.

Life in Sofia is not easy because we have no social contacts, we do not speak the language, and it is clear that the confinement situation has complicated things for us. It is nonetheless serene because we found out that Wim and I are living our confinement together very well. Of course, the luxury of having a large apartment and having enough space to each have our own office helps keep us on our toes. But we enjoyed discovering this new rhythm of life, and let's reflect together on the future.

One thing is sure: Wim will not start traveling again as he did before. To experience it every day, we know that it is entirely possible to work remotely and organize meetings and conferences. In the last few months, I have attended a few virtual training and conferences taking place in United States, or in fact 3 nights (between 6 p.m. and 5 a.m.). Instead of having to pay travel costs, I have the benefits of attending more training opportunities than ever before. This is absolutely amazing, and I can guarantee you that I benefited a lot from even from a far.

It is all these experiences, all these discoveries, all the difficult moments that we went through and which were able to materialize positively that make me think that the year 2020 will remain a great, challenging, surprising, rewarding year and, above all, an extraordinary opportunity. That we were able to grasp and which allowed us to pivot, to start different projects, and to enable us to see the future with a positive perspective.

No, I don't know what tomorrow will bring. Still, I am confident, I am positive, yes, I am an eternal positive. I know that whatever happens, we will continue to progress and take back control of our lives, hoping, very sincerely, that we will soon be able to find our friends, embrace each other, and fully relive the human warmth of our relationships.

So, now that we are closing this surprising year 2020, I can only wish us to see each other again soon, to be able to kiss each other again and to spend new moments together, moments I will cherish, so important for me 😊

Excellent end of year celebrations, even if they will not be as festive as those of previous years, but waiting to celebrate them again as we are used to.



Health, Joy, Positivity,
Love, and a lot of
amazing opportunities!

See you soon I hope,

Sophie

