

A STATE WITHOUT IDENTITY, A DRIVER WITHOUT NAVIGATION

By Zorana Baković



Does Serbia have a strategy? This question has arisen by itself since the more the Government in Belgrade claims that Serbia has it, the more confident the citizens are that it does not exist. I have therefore discussed this issue with Mirjana Prljević, President of Energy Innovation Center TESLIANUM in Belgrade, which deals with the promotion of one of the most significant dimensions of the region positioning, i.e. innovations and innovative solutions in the energy sector.

“Tesla’s mind helps us to acquire a deeper understanding of the fact that all of us in the Balkans have been facing disturbed frequencies of peace for a longer period of time”, says Mirjana Prljević, who has been involved in strategic positioning, as one of the fundamental pillars of economic development, for decades.

- I would like to start from the latest data of the Regional Cooperation Council, which at the recently held conference of the South-East European Countries warned about the fact that economic indicators in all the seven countries in the region - in Serbia, B&H, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Albania - were very bad. What does this speak of the region? What are the common roots of the negative trends?

M.P: The Regional Cooperation Council is really one of the more important players in the region which not only points at the challenges facing all its countries, but also provides particular strategic guidelines for the improvement of economic cooperation. I observe this Report through a prism of the strategy that the Council has recently offered, Strategy SEE2020. It clearly indicates that the priorities of reforms will

further be directed at strengthening the economic policy in the region and considerable changes for the IPA II Program. Through trade and investment integrations, education and innovations, energy and infrastructure, the focus will be on the greatest possible inclusion of private sector in infrastructure project financing. In my opinion, this opens, we could say, Pandora's Box of the Balkans, which indicates that the bases for such a step are not good.

I would also like to draw attention to another important meeting. It is the EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Conference, recently held in Thessaloniki, which has, on its side, reaffirmed the European perspective of the Western Balkans. There we could hear that the natural disaster which hit the Balkan countries showed solidarity of the neighbors, but also the lack of organized and legally arranged cooperation of countries in the region. For instance, Serbia and Croatia did not have a bilateral agreement on acting in the event of natural disasters, so that Serbia did not dispose of data on water levels in the upper Sava River, which were of significance for the flood defense planning. Except for national crisis committees, there was no common committee that would gather the information and coordinate activities in the field to mitigate the damage. According to Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Oskar Benedikt, it is also necessary to intensify economic cooperation, since 20 percent of trade of every country is carried out within the region. It is very indicative that he underlines that European investors observe the Balkans as a single entity when they consider it as an investment destination. In my opinion, these are the key words that we should pay attention to - harmonization of the positioning of the Balkans as a single region; a region that needs a real GPS, i.e. the Global Positioning Strategy. This speaks of the fact that this area still does not have a clear vision of itself as a region, while others observe it as a whole.

- What is GPS? How would you define it in a precise, clear and comprehensive manner?

MP: The Global Positioning Strategy (GPS) is as important for a country as the GPS system is for a car. I am sure that all drivers know how important it is to have a detailed and precise trip plan when they travel along known and unknown routes. Even minor detours may lead you to a wrong way. At this moment, when the position of Serbia in modern international relations requires designing and hard work to achieve repositioning, I have proposed adoption of the GPS of Serbia. The positioning is not what you have done for your product, but what you have done for the consumers' awareness in relation to their perception of your product. The GPS concept itself can be defined as the development and support to private and state-owned property, relationship with the government or the army, as well as business partnership with foreign countries positioned at key strategic points, whether independently or in multilateral agreements, aiming at gathering information, influence, power or technological expertise.

We can freely say that the positioning strategy is nowadays much more present than it can be noticed on the basis of mere market observation. Why do I say that the improvement of Serbia's international position is unthinkable without a well defined GPS? To put it simply, that is because the effects of strategic positioning lead to success and prosperity of the country. The effects are largely reflected in the following: obstacles for competitors are successfully created, solid bases for the so-called "tuning" of GPS are established, and the positions are strengthened in relation to other strategically important countries, international banks and investment funds, as well as international institutions such as the World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund. A wisely defined GPS, which would encourage the government of a country and its citizens to implement it, certainly leads to long-term sustainable success. And this also applies to Serbia.

- How do you see the strategy of the region in this area? In your works you mention the 3C formula, which relates to communication, coordination and cooperation in a broader, regional context.

M.P: In every country in the region in question we suffer from partiality and lack of an integrated approach to solving problems. What is most important is that the dimension of sustainability of objectives defined by national strategies is not inadequately regulated. Only in Serbia there are 177 different strategies, which are, in certain aspects, paradoxical and contrary to each other. They resemble wish lists, rather than documents that should clearly and precisely define the ways and means for the achievement of desired and precisely set objectives. Therefore, we do not have clear strategies from which annual action plans should be derived and presented to us. What are then the action plans that we could hear in the past one or two years?

Diagnosis of the economic situation, which is the first and most important step in further development of the Balkans, is either not completed or is partially completed in certain sectors. Until this is done, the proposed strategies will hardly be realized to the full extent and within the framework that they define. That is why the biggest problem identified during the preparation of the said strategy is the unemployment in the region. The strategy is thus entitled Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective. We produce generations of bachelors who cannot find jobs. Without a deep reform (and diagnostics) of the education system, with all aspects of formal and informal education, based on modern economic, scientific and technological, and innovation trends, we cannot go far.

The golden 3C rule which I point at in my GPS methodology is the observance of the integral approach rules within the sustainability of the given strategic framework, established on the principle of efficient and effective communication-coordination-cooperation. Without this "bloodstream" of information I don't see a successful analysis of any reform steps. If you don't plan, you have nothing to control, and I see neither long-term plans for a strategic period of at least 25 years, nor control activities that should point at this most important dimension of governing a state.

- How would you associate the state identity crisis with the economic situation in Serbia?

M.P: We are the witnesses that the world economic crisis has shown that old models of governing, old recipes of conducting are no longer acceptable. We have already seen a consequence of globalization in the form of "new economic diplomacy" as the most efficient "weapons" of the growing industrial powers of the world, which leads to a conclusion that the new world order, comprising the Western Axis countries, on one side, and BRICS member countries (Brasil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), on the other side, will be divided, and I believe, as a strategist, that it will also be harmonized at a higher strategic level.

- You have lived in China and you are familiar with developing countries. What can you conclude from their gathering, based on your experience?

M.P: The aim of the BRICS group is to change the former order in which the USA acts as a hegemon, i.e. the only "superpower". Some political and economic analysts estimate that permanent exclusion of Russia from G8 might increase the significance of BRICS. Peter Birle, Head of the Research Department at the Ibero-American Institute (IAI) in Berlin, assesses that the five BRICS member countries want to permanently "break" the relations of power established beyond 1945, i.e. to relativize

the power of the USA. Brazil puts all its hopes into the intensification of cooperation among the BRICS member countries. On 15 and 16 July, i.e. immediately after the football world championship and only three months before the presidential elections, Brazil will host the BRICS summit in Fortaleza. The most important issue will be the establishment of a joint development bank, with the initial capital of USD 100 billion.

- Let's go back to the identity of Serbia and the region in which the country is situated.

M.P: I am sure that Serbs would like their country to become a new Serbia. The identity crisis of the individual leads to the identity crisis of the society, and then also the state; after that it goes back to the starting point, where the individual does not know any more what and where he/she is. We have a very complex situation in Serbia when it comes to the perception of our country by its citizens. What does the country mean to political elites that run it, to tycoons who appeared in the transitional period, to professors, sportspersons... we have so many different perceptions of Serbia in its myths and legends that we do not know who we are any more, which is exactly the most tragic moment of a nation and a country - incompatibility of identities. When this does not exist we also have a dangerous economic situation that is primarily characterized by the arrival of speculative capital that is now difficult to identify, which is evident from all the steps taken by the Serbian Government in the past couple of months. The floods have only pointed at difficult challenges and irregularities in strategic running of the country, both in the economy and other sectors. Unless this is changed in accordance with realistic and modern solutions, it will not be good for Serbia's European path. We should realize that we are implementing the reforms required by Europe because of ourselves and our society, the future of the nation and sustainability of the state system, rather than because it is a wish of European partners.

- Why do you think that Serbia does not have the right positioning strategy? What is missing to establish it?

M.P: Every well designed GPS must comprise a clearly defined economic component, safety component and a sustainability framework within which all of these can be modified through tactical moves in relation to unforeseen events. Every successful positioning strategy is preceded by the diagnostics stage, which has not yet been implemented in Serbia; this also brings into question all the existing strategies, since there is no integrated view of development, which thus also brings into question the sustainability and value of all the already defined strategies for certain industrial branches, and even the national strategy for sustainable development.

The most important element that the region and all the countries within it, particularly Serbia, are missing is properly established Communication, where "C" is capitalized intentionally. We have just seen it in the consequences of the emergency situation that has befallen us. However, if every bad has something good in it, in my opinion, Serbia should the soonest possible start a broader sweep of education for diagnosing problems in the field, responding to challenges and recognizing opportunities offered in cooperation with both the EU and other partners.

- What else burdens Serbia today? On one side, there is no identity and, on the other side, the identity has been kidnapped by individuals...

M.P: The very lack of Communication and Cooperation points at another important problem that is clearly seen in Serbia - personalization of functions, personalization of positions, and personalization of profession. As citizens, we cannot clearly see any more what the institutions are, what the government

is, what the army is, or what our academic elite is. I think that the soonest possible we should start a serious analysis of our own development objectives, partners that would support us on that way as well as people with whom we intend to achieve this. Personalization leads to a wrong perception and thus brings into question even the good things that the Government has managed to do, which is exactly what is dangerous for it.

- There is much talk about the personalization of functions in Serbia, but it is not an uncommon occurrence in other countries of the region either. What should be done to strengthen the institutions?

M.P: We should establish an expert group of individuals who have proven themselves in their fields of expertise and who will really know how a reform of the crisis of institutions is implemented. Without this consolidated group of experts, lawyers, economists, sociologists and other scientists who will independently and seriously form "a single voice" and whose conclusions will be binding for the Prime Minister, I think that we will not be able to get any further. With any partial initiatives in which political party staff, i.e. incompetent but suitable personnel is important and where there are no proven authorities, not even the first step of transformation will be achieved. Integrity, consistency, transparency and the authority of knowledge are the characteristics of individuals that we need; and the individuals should originate from this region. Only then can we advance to the next level - the level of consultations with international experts who should point at the reality of the offered solutions, since the sustainability of any strategy is not possible without institutions. It remains only on paper. A strategy first implies having a system, and the system implies having institutions. We in Serbia and, realistically speaking, in the region as well, haven't had this for a long time.

- Do you think that constant focusing on regionalization is contrary to European principles of the region? Can you clarify this a little?

M.P: In the EU, the policy of the region is clearly expressed, while in the Balkans we talk more about regionalization. I think that attention should be paid to those clearly different phenomena in a timely manner, since on our way to the EU we need a policy (of course, within strategies, particularly the GPS) that would ensure establishment of powerful regions. The personal experience that I encountered when I visited Baden-Wurttemberg, one of the members of the "Four Motors for Europe", comprising four most developed regions of the EU (BW, Lombardy, Catalonia and Rhône-Alpes), implies long-term sustainable and clearly designed integral concepts for development of industrial "powers" in accordance with the potential of the region (in the base of staff, resources, financial incentives, etc.). We in the Balkans are constantly afraid of strong regions, and it seems that this fear has been preventing us for centuries from seeing the so clear (not to say the only) dimension of success in sports (and life): together we are stronger, united we are the strongest. It is not surprising that Nikola Tesla, one of the most important persons from our region, said that fear was the biggest obstacle for the humanity. I speak of that fear - the primal Balkan fear that prevents us from seeing further than a 4-year election cycle.

- What would you start from in changing this?

M.P: Let me finish with the following words: woe to those who take authorities as the truth, instead of taking the truth as the only authority. Until our Balkan political and academic elites start supporting this, I am not sure that we will know where we are going and why we are going there.

<http://www.delos.si/zgodbe/sobotnapriloga/drzava-brez-identitete-voznik-brez-navigacije.html>