

What kind of Nachertanie would Ilija Garašanin suggest nowadays? For people like him, what would be the key goals of Serbia's foreign policy today?

The consequences of the Russian attack on Ukraine created an environment that hardly any of the current politicians could have wished for. Unpredictability, instability, vulnerability – these are key determinants for describing the new political reality. However, we are hardly in a worse position compared to the Ottoman-dependent Principality of Serbia from the middle of the 19th century.

Apparently, Garašanin would be shocked at what we have tried in these almost 180 years. Projects that realized what he and his contemporaries truly dreamed of – that the Serbian people scattered across the Balkans live independently in one larger political entity. Those unfortunate experiments with good intentions failed after all.

Maybe it's time to try something new. What, during the modern political history of Europe, was tried by many whom we look up to. The ones we don't seem to be learning from fast enough. From the Benelux countries, through the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly, all the way to the Visegrad Group, there are many lessons in the second half of the twentieth century – in addition to the most important one about the creation of the EU – about successful experiments in how connection and integration create sustainable foundations for the preservation of national interests.

The fundamental values of the original Načertani are basically nationally integrative. In accordance with the position of the then Principality of Serbia, such integration first of all implied the horizon of political independence with a closer national awareness, massification, building and nurturing of Serbian culture and language. In today's time, when the very concept of sovereignty is approached flexibly, and the dominant concern becomes depopulation and striving for a better quality of life, successful national integration would certainly have a different character.

In the spirit of its original, the imagined Načertanije 2.0 would initially show a measured and cool head the environment in which Serbia and the Serbian people find themselves today. From all sides, except across the river Drina, we are surrounded by countries that have made a historic agreement that in the event of an attack on them, they will defend each other. Citizens of Serbia who suffered an aggressive bombing campaign 23 years ago (when no one outside even thought of defending us militarily) leave their motherland in large numbers every year and prefer to go to the countries of that defense alliance of 30 powerful states. There is not much to write about Serbia's trade and investment connection with the key countries of Western Europe.

The puzzle of our environment is very complex. The hard-to-reach normalization with Pristina, the quarrel over the crimes of the past with Zagreb, encounters with blockades and systemic fellers from Sarajevo and all the accompanying identity labyrinths from which we cannot get out, are also part of that political environment.

Particularly worrisome phenomena in that environment are identity vultures - a special kind of politicians, analysts, activists, and even journalists who, deepening mistrust for personal gain, live in the present from divisions and conflicts from the past. The acceptance of their narratives should not be underestimated because the scars of the Balkans are still fresh. However, it should not be overestimated because the citizens of the region are first of all eager for a better quality of life, and only then for the satisfaction of real or imagined historical injustices.

The agreement of the key states of the West clearly set the framework for the scope of today's nationally integrative policy. This inexorable fact of the relationship of forces and interests should by no means be perceived as a fateful national obstacle. A circumstance that, with a mixture of sadness, anger and indignation, we will wait to change due to more favorable geopolitical circumstances, as they say in the pub. As long as we think burdened by those negative feelings, we will not see that we are actually still not using the key opportunities within such a set framework.

Serbia, after all, has an opportunity to lead a nationally integrative policy based on liberal foundations - individual freedom, market economy, tolerance, building bridges and removing as many obstacles as possible between the people of our region. Such commitment to connectivity is a national interest of the first rank.

The goals set to protect the interests of the Serbian people in the region and beyond will be most effectively achieved through a common economic space. Unfettered forms of cooperation between citizens and businesses, along with an open cultural exchange during which other people's dignity and differences are respected, calm the echoes of identity vultures. This, therefore, facilitates the implementation of a national policy that would not be directed against anyone. The relevant issues of threats to life and property, relations of discrimination or other structural problems of members of the Serbian people in the region will be answered more effectively if their solution is based on the described framework.

The greatest global value of such an approach is that the key political factors of the West, on which the projecting scope of Serbia's regional influence depends, would support such Nachertanije. In that, for example, lie the answers to why the United States of America supports the regional economic initiative Open Balkans.

We often talk about historical events. Perhaps even more often about historical failures. The current situation, however, does offer a number of opportunities that don't come around that often. Perhaps the most important such opportunity in terms of our foreign policy is Serbia's position as a key actor in building regional unity.

Some in the region seem to take Western support for granted today. Traditional partners gamble with the patience of their allies. They say and do things that are not at all supported in Western capitals. There is no longer *carte blanche* for traditional US allies in the region. Echoes of warmongering, rattling drones, unilateral and exclusive behavior ignore the

fragile regional balance.

In our region, everything is seen in comparison. The assessment of the behavior of one capital is always interpreted in relation to the actions of the other. Therein lies the most important opportunity for Belgrade to set a long-term direction of political action. The more others oppose an active effort to build unity, the more it can only bring Belgrade additional points with those with the greatest influence in the region. The key issue here, however, is not tactical maneuvering to score easy political points in the short term. It is a question of charting the long-term direction of Serbia's foreign policy. More drawn up, which would imply political solutions for national integration based on the most advanced European models. In such liberal models of national integration, political borders are relieved in order to increase the social, economic and cultural potentials for the development of individuals. Wouldn't such a Nachertanie in the 21st century carry enough romantic enthusiasm even for a pragmatic Ilija Garašanin if he proposed it today, Talas writes.