

## A STRATEGIC CLUB FOR BULGARIA AND THE WIDER REGION

Todor Tanev

### Abstract

As a consequence of the currency board introduced in 1997 Bulgaria became an island of fiscal stability among the South European countries. However this is an insufficient basis for further successful development of the country as a member of the European family. A decisive change in the socio-political model is needed if obstacles such as corrupt judicial system, organized crime, legal predictability, etc. are to be overcome. The problem is that the institutions set up as they are have no capability to make this change effectively given the impossibility for non-partisan vision. Therefore it is after the currency board that another “political board” should be introduced. By no means is it an interference of the European governing bodies in the governance of sovereign Bulgaria. The positive and realistic form of a “political board” is a “Strategic board” creating those complementary scenarios for the long-term European future of Bulgaria that the country itself is unable to produce alone and without which Bulgaria cannot make a decisive progress. The creation of such a joint Bulgarian-European board is proposed here in the shape of a Strategic club “Euxinograd” named after the 120 year old Black Sea governmental residence which symbolizes the Balkans and the wider Black Sea region location of Bulgaria. A European non-partisan long-term strategic framework for Bulgaria can break the vicious circle in which the country is suffocating. The principles on which the Club would be based as well as its design and structure are investigated.

After the stabilizing success of the currency board it seems that Bulgaria should take the next step by adopting some sort of political board. Financial stability remains an incomplete basis for deeper European integration without further political measures. Political reforms have stalled and the country seems not to be able to cope alone with the corrupt judiciary and organized crime.

This is not a “political board” in the form of “strict control through a mechanism for cooperation and verification” for weaknesses in preparation for the EU membership of Bulgaria and Romania before 1 January 2007 announced by the President of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso<sup>1</sup>.

Of course, we are not talking about any interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state. The notion is not about the once widely discussed idea of introducing a form of “political board” in Bulgaria that would lead to Europeanization through the sacrifice of national sovereignty in favor of direct European control<sup>2</sup>. Such a utopia is usually presented as an instrument for the rescue of Bulgaria from its own politicians, who are fused with organized crime, and a means for Bulgarians to finally start living well, have their rights protected, secure good governance for the country and a more secure state. Ideas have been proposed for suitable ways of turning Bulgaria into the first European “federal territory” through delegation of central governance to the European structures or even by converting the country into a territory directly subordinate to the EU institutions<sup>3</sup>.

The notion of political board should refer only to the production of long-term European strategic scenarios for Bulgaria by independent international and local experts to assist the governments of Bulgaria. This long-term strategic vision is largely missing in Bulgaria. It would be difficult to create it within the Bulgarian political model, which is based on the dominance of political parties and their short-lived mandates. The lack of a state Grand Strategy in the broadest

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<sup>1</sup> 1.1.2007 - България в ЕС, но с политически борд. *Sega daily*, September 27, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Любомирска, М. Политически борд за българските партии. *Novinar daily*, February 11, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Цитат в десетката: Време е за политически борд. *E-vestnik.bg*, July 22, 2008

sense of this term leads to chaos and unpredictability in policies on energy, ecology, sustainable economic development, education, etc. Conversely, the existence of long-term non-partisan political consent can decisively help the improvement Bulgaria's position as a member of the European family.

The currency board is the single most powerful example so far of what needs to be done in the political sphere if the negative effects of localism in it are to be filtered out. Allegorically speaking, "*the Bulgarian government must refrain from printing money with no coverage*" in exchange for receiving stability and growth.

The need for assisted long-term strategizing is not unique to Bulgaria. It is typical of the wider Black Sea region. The idea of a political board seems applicable beyond Bulgaria. It can be exported to other countries stretching from the Western Balkans to the Caucasus, especially if such an experiment shows a positive effect.

### ***The Currency board***

Over the last 50 years Bulgaria has four state bankruptcies, 3 of them during the communist regime (1960-61, 1977-78, 1987-89)<sup>4</sup> and the one immediately after it.

Only the outcome of the last one results in stability. Since 1997 Bulgaria has been operating under a currency board. It is institutionalized through the Issue Department of the Bulgarian National Bank, whose primary function is defined as maintaining full foreign exchange coverage for the total amount of the BNB's monetary liabilities. The exchange rate of the Bulgarian lev was fixed by law to the deutschmark and later to the euro. The currency board was designed so that foreign currency reserves equal much more than 100% of the monetary base.

Hence, the stock of foreign currency reserves is more than adequate not only compared to the level of reserve money, but also to the broader money supply. The fiscal reserve plays an important role in controlling the money supply and keeping inflation in check. Thanks to restrictive fiscal policy and the pursuit of budget surpluses, the government's fiscal reserve has grown substantially over the last couple of years. Thus the last few years have all ended with fiscal surpluses. Clearly, the currency board plays a stabilizing role of fiscal reserve.

More importantly, the Bulgarian banking system has remained stable since the introduction of the currency board. Under a currency board arrangement, domestic central banks can no longer play the role of the lender of last resort for local commercial banks. However, in case of systematic liquidity risks to the entire banking system, the Bulgarian central bank can extend short-term loans to local banks which must be entirely collateralized with gold, foreign currency or other liquid assets.

Political stability is perhaps the most important consequence of the currency board in Bulgaria. All cabinets since the introduction of the currency board arrangement in mid-1997 have completed their four-year terms without any serious political problems. There is wide consensus among all of the bigger domestic parties that the currency board will be kept in place until Bulgaria's accession to the Eurozone.

This is why currently Bulgaria has a low risk of sovereign default, unlike other southern European countries, according to Professor Edward Altman, the creator of the formula that calculates how long it takes a company to go into liquidation<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Христов, Хр. Тайните фалити на комунизма. Сиела, 2012

<sup>5</sup> България не е заплашена от фалит. Money.bg, Monday, November 5, 2012, [http://money.bg/news/id\\_427119438](http://money.bg/news/id_427119438)

### ***The problem***

Fiscal discipline in the banking sector itself does not ensure overall progress; it only deters discouraging political regress. The currency board cannot solve all the cardinal issues of Bulgaria's development. Moreover, the currency board is a strictly national project, while the future of the country is the result of developments in the wider regional and global context. Decisive progress can be expected only if the economic model is accordant with the policies of Bulgaria's government.

The undue influence of political parties on public life leads to many problems that hinder development. The Bulgarian model after 1991 of a parliamentary republic with a unicameral parliament, presidential powers vaguely defined and the judiciary being bound by political appointees on the basis of quotas of the other two powers has led to some degree of uncontrollability of key political actors. Political parties in Bulgaria have a relatively wide range of opportunities to pursue the interests of hidden economic groups, political circles or even foreign countries with traditionally strong presence in Bulgarian politics.

Such a political mainstream favors corruption, volatility and reduced administrative capacity of the government. Moreover, it has a negative impact on the future. Political parties are unable to develop the much-needed grand-strategic vision of the nation, possible only when grounded in broad public and political consent. The result is a vicious cycle in which the parties cannot strategize for the nation and, reversely, the strategic deficit thus accumulated causes the rigidity of bad practices and inefficient political governance. This cycle must be broken – the sooner the better.

The interference of partisan politics with strategic deficit, the hidden influences from inside and outside as well as the unreformed judiciary create a huge obstacle for the European development of Bulgaria. The financial stability provided by the currency board is a condition but not a means to overcome this effect. Resorting to more radical constitutional changes is theoretically possible but practically unrealistic because of the resistance that such an idea can provoke among all political parties.

However, the alternative path of gradual improvement of the socio-political framework of European development seems quite realistic. Instead of relying only on the inefficient direct attempts to remove hidden influences and corruption of the judiciary, a brand new approach can be started, that is, breaking the vicious circle of strategic deficit.

A long-term European strategic framework for Bulgaria following a broad consensus of the international community, offering the best prospects for decision makers in Bulgarian politics and business is the real “political board” that can reshape the current structure of interests and reposition the now existing power constellations.

### ***Bulgarian strategies***

As far as the Bulgarian strategic management in the public sector is concerned, there is a clear-cut excess of strategic documents accumulated so far (numerous documents pretending to be sectoral strategies). At the same time there exists a complete deficit of a general long-term strategy for socio-economic development and security. The large volume of “strategic” documents in Bulgaria does not compensate the lack of such grand strategy (some 200 documents were collected and exposed on a special site of Council of Ministers, [www.strategy.bg](http://www.strategy.bg)). On the contrary, the way those documents were developed creates an even bigger problem.

The single effort for creation of a grand-strategic framework for Bulgaria so far dates back to 2007. It is not Bulgarian; it is Russian. It was named “Strategic matrix for the

development of the Republic of Bulgaria”<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, it contains a number of gaps and limitations and therefore cannot serve as anything more than a methodological lesson of what should not be done. This attempt strays from the basic modern ideas about the contents of grand-strategy of a country such as a reduced role of parameters of the past in shaping the future, a multivariant frame instead of a fixed “matrix,” systematic accumulation of strategic meanings instead of fixed end-goals, broad public discussions from the very beginning of the formation of the grand strategic framework instead of strategizing in isolation, expert networking instead of individual authored work, etc.

Moreover, almost all Bulgarian documents marked “strategy” are actually plans. However, plan and strategy are opposites<sup>7</sup>:

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Strategy</b>
The source of plans is the objective situation of the external and internal environment and the trends of development.	The source of strategy is strategic intent and possible futures.
Plans have a clear time horizon. It does not exceed just few years ahead.	Strategies have a very distant, “rolling forward” time horizon which is therefore indefinite.
Plans allocate resources and put actions in order: layout plan.	Strategies provide resources and fix priorities: conceptual plan.
Plans provide efficiency.	Strategies provide advantages.

The closedness of most Bulgarian strategic documents to plans drives them away from playing a more serious strategic role. Various factors contribute to this unsatisfactory state of affairs.

One factor is the so-called “Methodology for Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria” from April 2010. It is directly stated in it that “the main types of strategic documents are strategy, policy, program, plan and concept” (?) and that “it is recommended that each strategy has the following structure: analysis of the state of the sector, vision for the sector’s development, guiding principles for implementation of the strategy, strategic objectives of sectoral policy, actions to achieve the objectives, and expected results from the proposed activities.”

These formulations are very misleading to those who follow them in order to create a long-term general strategy and not simply a government plan. For example, in this document it is the objective state of affairs (the objective situation) rather than the subjective strategic intention that is considered the source of a strategy. Apparently “vision” is perceived as stemming from the scan of the running situation – however, visions do not emerge from the application of SWOT analysis and the like. As described in the document, strategic vision comes as a surprise. Furthermore, the authors of the instructions have not placed the strategy’s guiding principles at the forefront of the document, but rather in third place. However, principles may only hold a leading position. They are not a subordinate of the objective situation. The authors have in mind only principles of “performance” and not principles guiding the formation of a strategic vision. The goals considered in these instructions are in fact not strategic, but regular public policy goals. Also, strategy as described in the document includes a “set of activities” and “expected results” exactly as a simple plan does. Action plans and planned specific results are hardly

<sup>6</sup> Агеев А.И., Апостолов А.Г., Куроедов Б.В. Стратегическая матрица Болгарии от древнейших времен до середины XXI века.

<sup>7</sup> This concept is developed in more detail in Tanev, T. *Efficiency and Effectiveness of Grand Strategy*. In: Публични политики.bg, Vol. 3 No. 1, 2012

elements of a strategy. The style of thinking of the French co-authors of this document is quite apparent in the overall approach to strategizing which follows the spirit of French statism. This philosophy does not suit the current needs of Bulgaria as a country escaping from the statism of its socialist past, experiencing a dramatic transition from one-party monopoly over the state, the economy and civil society toward democracy and free-market economy.

A different factor that also leads to lack of strategic content within Bulgarian “strategic” documents is the way in which they are created. Ministries and departments that are directly subordinate to the party in power make efforts to create “strategies” for the coordination of centralized government management of different sectors of public life. Such documents are government plans for management of public sectors for the time of the political mandate of the ruling party, not real strategies. These “strategies”, or plans, are created either by the apparatus of the ministry in charge with the public sector, or by sociological agencies or institutes of economic analysis hired by the ministries on the basis of political or economic ties. The product created in this way cannot exceed the limitations of what has been expected initially by the officials who order the strategy. The “strategies” thus formulated bear all faults of short-lived partisan politics. The experts working in each ministry are familiar with the problems of the particular sector being managed; however, they are neither qualified at all to develop strategies, nor have sufficient free time after completing their everyday routines. In other words, the officers working in ministries possess capacity that is sufficient only for the conversion of routine annual plans of their ministries in texts entitled “Strategy.” Those who have ordered the strategic document do not expect to receive anything other than “long-term” plan (this usually means just 3-5 year period ahead) because they are unprepared to expect anything more than that. They are largely unaware of what a true strategy can provide. Strategizing is not a matter of intuition of otherwise intelligent people. It requires very special knowledge acquired after long and serious preparation.

The lack of strategic content in the documents intended to be strategies is due not only to the lack of strategic skills of their authors – a shortage that cannot be compensated by their awareness of the problems existing in the public sector in which they work. A vital element of real strategy formation is the achievement of broad consensus on its content: consensus in the form of interagency agreement on key issues, a consent between rulers and ruled, between politicians and experts, between national and international bodies, between present and future generations. Without the fundament of such consent, any strategy designed in principle to have longevity and power appears to be, in practice, short-lived and ephemeral and lacks the time and energy to unfold. This is why the civilized attitude towards strategies requires systematic public and expert consultation during their formation and realization. The thorough and conscientious consultation of all strategic ideas with actual representatives of key stakeholders in the strategic process is a crucial part of the broader initial discussions on strategic issues.

Creating strategy is an inclusive and not an exclusive process. Alas, public discussions of strategies in Bulgaria are limited both in terms of representation and contents. The idea is not about violation of democratic rules. Botched public discussions on strategic issues result inevitably in a lower quality of strategic ideas generated by isolated expert groups appointed by political parties. The principle of consent is significantly ignored. This issue is crucial. If all important perspectives are considered in a preliminary dialogue, then this would lead to mutual concessions needed to secure rich content of the strategic concept being developed. The emerging strategy would thus become efficient and durable. However, the widespread practice of discussing strategies in Bulgaria is to familiarize some selected audiences with an already existing text. If new ideas are still born by chance at such discussions there is neither time nor mechanism for their systematic development and incorporation in the “strategy” discussed. It seems that the creators of the strategic text aim exactly at sabotaging the “uncontrolled” (from their point of view) expansion through directed discussion of the strategic content planned. The

goal being pursued by such *post factum* discussions is not shaping the strategic vision but rather legitimating the ready text at minimum cost. Typical participants in such events organized by the authorities are usually limited numbers of students and university professors gathered in the main auditorium of the given university. A less common practice is organizing meetings with selected experts together with representatives of mass media in a centrally-located hotel in the capital city.

A different type of “real” discussions is organized in parallel to the official ones above mentioned. These are the hearings of top officials at the ministries with the experts who authored the draft strategic texts following the authorities’ instructions. These debates are very detailed and comprehensive. Any idea or any part of the text that is deemed either directly or indirectly, actually or potentially threatening the hegemony of the party in power is immediately removed. It is therefore extremely difficult, if not impossible, to create lasting and efficient strategies in this setting. For instance, it is hardly possible that a meaningful strategy for administrative reform in Bulgaria is formulated today if it is based on the famous Northcote-*Trevelyan* principle of separation of public administration from the political class by suspension of political appointments as well as political dismissals of higher ranking civil servants and by recruitment of administrative staff on merit basis.

Advice from abroad is often perceived as a “necessary evil” by those making decisions about government policies. The reaction that follows is usually the formal inclusion of texts containing Western strategic requirements in the Bulgarian documents so that penalties are avoided or, conversely, certain benefits are secured such as access to grants.

The next source of strategic deficit in “strategic” documents is that they are created for the simple reason of operational management of specific problems within particular public sectors or organizations. The “strategies” are dispersed over a great variety of separate issues and therefore they are unrelated to one another. Not only are the various “strategies”, “frameworks” or “state policies” unrelated with each other, but, moreover, they are not subject to a common general political project that stretches beyond current party mandates. “A politician thinks of the next election; a *statesman* of the next generation” is the phrase that separates planning from strategizing in a given country.<sup>8</sup>

Bulgarian governments with all their scattered operational strategies need a more general political platform that is not existent in the country. Strategic documents and policies of the EU, UN and NATO are directly adopted to serve that role. The fundamental problem of “imported” grand strategic frameworks is that no international document (community strategic plans in this number) may replace the missing national one in principle. European community strategizing in turn has been blocked for decades by the Brussels bureaucracy and lately by the state debt crisis. The EU itself experienced a sharp strategic deficit even before that crisis, a fact that is well exemplified by the unsuccessful Strategy “2020.”

Europe 2020<sup>9</sup> looked more like a set of good wishes rather than a strategy. Pretending to be a strategy, this document failed to foresee the crisis that came as a great surprise to its creators. Europe 2020 aims at “smart, sustainable, inclusive growth” with greater coordination of national and European policy. However, this goal is currently postponed to a new mythical “2030” rescue time boundary. Europe 2020 “planned” to raise the employment rate from 69% to “at least” 75% but the tendencies just 2 years later appeared to be different. The greenhouse gas emissions have not started to be lowered as a result of a “20% reduction of energy consumption and 20% increase of energy efficiency” by the end of the decade. The reduction of the number of Europeans living below national poverty line has not started at all.

More importantly, Europe 2020 has a preset deadline that stretches just one single decade ahead. This is not only an extremely brief period compared to the span of a real strategy. Grand

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<sup>8</sup> Attributed to the American educator James Freeman Clarke

<sup>9</sup> Europe 2020 is a 10-year strategy proposed by the European Commission on 3 March 2010 for advancement of the economy of the European Union.

strategies are the concepts of constant movement and have no strict deadlines. Deadlines are characteristic only for small-scale operational strategies. No serious country or alliance applies a decade or even two to grand strategy formation – neither Turkey nor China nor Korea. The joint EC “policies” are not strategic but rather normative; in fact, they exist in the form of directives from Brussels. In any case, they cannot compensate for the lack of a European strategic vision.

Bulgarian governments try to import elements of state strategy from other sources as well as attempting to compensate for the missing national strategic framework. One such source is NATO. However, a frustrating coincidence is that this alliance has been changing its strategic outlook for some time now. Traces of strategic crisis can also be found in the UN – an organization that seems not to have forgotten anything old while having not learned anything new after the end of the Cold War. The new era poses the need of adequate reaction to new global phenomena such as terrorism and world economic crises.

Local circumstances in recent years put an even greater emphasis on the need of a long-range strategic vision for Bulgaria. The Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute in 2009 and other major Russian projects in Bulgaria demonstrated the country’s total dependence in this and other segments of the economy and international relations. The Burgas International Airport terrorist attack of 2012 detonated the Bulgarian national security strategy at the same instant the bomb killed the Israeli tourists. The global financial crisis and the crisis in the EU moved the country away from the Eurozone. The entry into Schengen was also postponed indefinitely.

No European or world strategy can be accepted as a substitute for the missing Bulgarian strategic perspective. How long can a country survive without a grand strategic framework? And at what cost?

The country still lacks general strategic vision. Its absence cannot be compensated by the strategies of international alliances in which Bulgaria is a member. Membership in the EU and NATO is not the end station but rather the first stop in the new journey of the country as a member of the family of democratic countries.

All the players from the vast “gray zone” of Bulgaria’s economy are nowadays busy transforming their economic power into a political one under the existing constitutional arrangements and the defects of the judiciary, cultural and institutional ones. An empowered new generation stemming from the old communist nomenclature has entered the local economic and political life which remains closed to outsiders. It is apparent that local political parties are dependent on this context, which makes them inefficient agents of a more radical change toward a fully democratic future. This is one more reason why they do not seem to be in a position to create a non-partisan strategic project.

### *The situation of the country*

The strategic framework for Bulgaria depends on the parameters of the contemporary situation in which the country is found. It might be summarized in the following way:

- Bulgaria is an EU member and is seen only in this capacity by non-European countries: primarily the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, South Africa and Brazil. For this reason all the problems of Bulgaria are defined from outside as EU issues. This condition largely precludes the opportunity for direct or independent negotiations of Bulgaria with countries outside the EU.
- The country is an EU member. More than two decades have elapsed since the collapse of the communist regime. Despite these facts Bulgaria continues to suffer the effects of traditional attitudes abroad inherited from the decades spanning from World War I to the Cold War. During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bulgaria has been put in an international isolation. This momentum shaping policies towards Bulgaria is still felt strongly.

- Traditional Russian influence in many spheres of social life remains to this day. Decisions of Bulgarian governments in key areas appear sometimes to be dependent on Russian interests. This political and economic asymmetry is seen by the West as something given. However, such a passive attitude fuels the status quo.

- Bulgaria is in the grip of external and internal forces from the “underworld”. Most of them originate from the former secret services of the communist regime<sup>10</sup>. They have no political legitimacy but possess significant institutional and psychological power. This legacy of the former Comintern policy in the Balkans is still felt and results in some forms of networking between local and Eastern economic groups. The Renaissance idealism of generations of Bulgarians from the early decades of the twentieth century no longer exists to resist the power of such key players.

- As one of the last countries liberated from the former Ottoman Empire (1878) Bulgaria has fallen permanently in the position of most affected country in the vortex of the Balkan nationalisms already existent at the time. Bulgarians are torn between their fears from the official policies of some neighboring countries and their sympathy for neighboring nations, their modes of thinking or specific ways of life.

- Regardless of historical turbulences of the past century and political culture change, the attitude of Bulgarians towards other cultures considered falling in opposite categories remain markedly positive. Respect and positive feelings characterizes mass perceptions toward Germany and Russia, the UK and China, the EU and the U.S. Sympathy flourishes simultaneously for Israel and many Arab nations. This cultural feature bears a generally positive charge, but it can be activated in effective policies only if it serves modern grand-strategic vision.

- Prevailing attitudes towards the past, the present and future are skeptical, pessimistic or nihilistic. They are fueled by the sense of belonging to a “small” vulnerable nation with poor historical fate, suffering from systemic poverty as well as fatal dependencies from local mafias and foreign superpowers. These mass attitudes are supported also by actual processes such as demographic collapse, a drained treasury and the deficit of constructive strategic ideas. But these fears appear only on the surface. Deep in their souls, Bulgarians highly anticipate better times ahead in the foreseeable future. Those positive expectations are more individual rather than collective. More and more people from different social strata actively and effectively work for their future.

Bulgaria's European perspective seems historically the most justified one. It is the only realistic perspective even in the current transitive and crisis context. Bulgaria has the potential to realize its European future. It has demonstrated its devotion to this orientation on numerous occasions so far. However, the national political system has neither capacity nor chance to react alone effectively and efficiently to make this future come true faster. After the currency board, which led to economic stability, a collaborative effort to create a viable strategic framework for the development of the country as a member of the European family is inevitably needed. The long-term historical perspective and the reinforcement of European ways of thinking can be secured only by a modern democratic grand strategy framework. Bulgarian strategic thinkers and experts need systematic assistance in this regard.

### ***The missing Grand Strategy***

We have to distinguish between the original concept of grand strategy as created by military historian Basil Liddell-Hart and its much broader contemporary meaning. Grand strategy

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<sup>10</sup> A special committee appointed by the Council of Ministers investigates the participation of members of the former secret services in Bulgaria's foreign affairs, education, economics, etc., and publishes data systematically on this occasion.

is the general philosophy of development of a society. It is a road, not a final state and therefore it has no final term or deadline as do regular strategic plans of particular organizations. Grand strategy creates the multiplier effect in the development of a society by giving a common meaning and impetus to all particular operational strategies. It is a particularly complex tool of government which synchronizes all actions and makes them most effective.

The following matrix describes grand strategy perhaps sufficiently<sup>11</sup>:

		Moral Economy ↓	Political Economy ↓	
Goals	Inward Oriented →	<b>Reinforcing the nation's Identity</b>	<b>the European Sustainable economic and institutional development as EU member-state</b>	Effective-ness
	Outward Oriented →	<b>Global promotion of national culture as part of the European value system</b>	<b>Reinforcing national security and economic expansion as EU member state</b>	
Methods	Cooperation →	<b>Nurturing of broad national consent for proactive European integration</b>	<b>Vitalization of the principles of Good Governance</b>	Efficiency
	Competition →	<b>Global initiative as EU member state</b>	<b>Global sustainable competitive advantage as EU member state</b>	

In short, the grand strategy of a state forms the most general framework for cultural (“moral economy”) and economic (“political economy”) (1) survival, (2) development and (3) expansion of the nation’s unique model in the context of strategic integration with other countries based on shared values in view of successful strategic competition at the global scale.

Grand strategic thinking and action occupies a small sector of a government’s total activities. Actually grand strategic thinking and action is the opposite of all lower levels of government simultaneously – of resource allocation, the formation and implementation of public policies, operational management, not to mention planning. Unlike all these lower levels of public management grand strategy stems from morality – i.e., from the leading public value principles that form the unique national specificity. These value principles are the basis of strategic cooperation with other states and nations that secures successful competitive positioning in global perspective. (For example, Konrad Adenauer resurrected Germany for the Germans and

<sup>11</sup> These ideas are developed in more detail in the article „Efficiency and Effectiveness of Grand Strategy”, „ПУБЛИЧНИ ПОЛИТИКИ.bg” Vol. 3, No. 1 (2012)

the world, starting first with denazification in order to be able to cooperate with other Western leaders later for the development of modern European identity – an identity in which eventually he repositioned the Germans.)

Grand strategy excludes the typically rational fixing of preformulated goals that is traditional for all other levels of public management. Instead, it lays down general priorities. This is not a separate one-time process with a clear end. Rather, it is an ongoing process of progressive step-by-step development and adaptation of strategic perspectives. It is true that ninety-nine percent of all situations in public management, however, require routine fixing of frozen targets. Strategists are a big exception among all public managers in a society since it is only they who manage like Odysseus to “tie themselves to the mast”, i.e. draw back from maximization in a running situation. They act in this way in order to give birth to the much wider horizon beyond any particular maximization (i.e. reach the maximum maximizations). This specific feature of genuine strategizing is already well known as the model of strategy formation while practicing parts of it already (“Strategy-as-Practice”).

This new and different concept of strategizing requires from public leaders to abandon classical rationality if they want to be strategists, not only leaders. They should engage in the direct design of their intentions for the future rather than try to extend to tomorrow the realities of today. A public leader should be aware of the fact that there are two futures – a planned future and a strategic future. Unlike the former, the latter is not a function of either past trends or present parameters. Instead, it is a “jump” or “trip” straight into the future. It is the definition of the current situation from the perspective of intentions for the future, not the opposite. History gives but also takes away.

Hence the firm conviction among contemporary strategic analysts that the formation of grand strategy is not a single act but a continuous process of gradual accumulation of strategic content and its step-by-step transformation into a profitable, flexible and robust socio-economic and political model. This eliminates the reflex, traditional in management, to predict the future as accurately as possible and build a single solid plan on this basis. Such a deterministic plan would be no more than a projection of the present into the future. As it can be assumed, this traditional approach is counterproductive when the goal is to delineate distant and broad horizons of multivariated development. The complexity of this context reduces drastically the efficiency and reliability of planning.

These arguments lead to the conviction that the formation of a country’s grand strategy is based on scenarios, not plans. Moreover, there are two or more alternative scenarios (“alternative futures”) since what will happen is a question of possibilities, and therefore all possibilities should be considered, not just the ones that are visible today. Therefore the creation of a grand strategy is a matter of scenario planning to a certain extent.

“There is no plan that survives after the first encounter with the enemy.” Especially when it comes to the distant future of a whole nation, uncertainties must be inserted in the formulas of governance. Still, grand-strategic planning takes account of certain parameters despite its nonparametric character. However, these are not the parameters of the situation (the famous application of SWOT analysis) but the parameters of all uncertainties. Uncertainties do have parameters since they are no less detectable than any facts of the past and the present. By considering uncertainties, the strategic leadership of a country actually places under its control all consequences of their existence for public management such as inaccuracy, doubt, reluctance, ambiguity, indecision and inconsistency.

In other words, grand strategy is a general framework in which alternative scenarios cover a number of possible developments that comply with the intentions for the future on which a critical consent is constantly developed and nurtured.

Given its origin in the multivariate future, grand strategy excludes from its contents any interpretative generalizations of the past and the present. The formation of grand strategy of a

state requires that “national doctrines” as created by historians as well as “national interests” as interpreted by different political parties are relinquished. What is important is to develop a progressive, modern, adaptive and prospective national identity instead of resurrecting maladaptive, inadequate forms of retrospective identity. Modern Germany is a good example in this regard.

Of course, this does not promote any historical or national nihilism. Quite on the contrary, grand strategy’s primary concern is about preserving and reinforcing national identity. The formative function of the nation’s past should be protected from its own natural tendency towards self-destruction caused by the inclination of cultures to both gradual self-isolation as well as regional and global expansion. National identity is a fundamental value enshrined in grand strategy since it generates the nation’s core competency which is the main source of sustainable competitive advantage .

The unique value constellation of a nation can be protected only by grand strategy. However this does not mean that the two coincide: grand strategy is not a national doctrine. The segment of the total strategy occupied by unique cultural elements as cast by history does not exceed the rest of the strategy’s contents occupied by the model of future. The past influences future enough, but it cannot define it totally. The same can be said for the present. It is true that current political interpretations form significant parts of the future, but in any case what we want to happen should not be locked into today’s partisan struggles taking place within short-lived mandates.

Within the framework of a grand strategy specific versions of it evolve in the form of “national causes.” Each of these doctrines corresponds to a completely different regional and global settings. Grand strategy survives by replacing the doctrines when historical circumstances change and impose the need of change. Reviving old doctrines brings trouble and misfortune .

The greatness of grand strategy stems from its extraordinarily rich context. Possessing several scenarios that altogether cover most possibilities and calculate most uncertainties enables public leadership to realize its intentions intact. No fixed blueprint for the future can be so instrumental. Unlike alternative scenarios that take into account uncertainties for keeping strategic intentions vital, planning the future appears to be in the best case the “Trojan horse” of self-restraint.

A nation’s grand strategy is bound to the unique context of national culture and equally to the developments in the region of the world the country exists in. Bulgaria’s strategic intent has never been independent from the Balkan context and that of the Black Sea region all the way to the Caucasus. Therefore, the creation of a Bulgarian strategic framework should cover issues of this wider context.

The “Political board” that should perhaps be applied to European countries in total transition like Bulgaria is actually a “Strategic board”, neither more nor less.

However, we need to distinguish between two diametrically opposed types of boards.

The first type of board is in fact a model to be followed by a country. A foreign state or alliance “tows” that country by imposing its will, values and demands by the use of its apparent dominant power. This board is equivalent to a program unconditionally imposed for compulsory execution. Bulgaria has experienced this type of political and socio-economic board several times within a century: the consequences of the Comintern caused turmoils in 1923, the coup d’etat of 1934 related once again to the Comintern, the Soviet-guided communist revolution of 1944, etc. Bulgaria does not need this type of board anymore.

The second type of political board is a strategy, or concept of development, to be followed by a given country. An alliance of states sharing common values influence the self-development of that country by offering an appropriate thesaurus of ideas of the first magnitude supporting the development of the country in the best possible way. Bulgaria needs this type of board if the nation deliberately wants to progress in the European family. The currency board is

quite similar to this philosophy. In this case there is no “towing” of any sort but rather support to internal processes. The influence exerted is contextual, not determining. This is a catalytic process reinforcing existing inner tendencies. It is possible that a foreign state takes the lead in the strategic alliance, however it should disclose its strategic scenarios.

Therefore a modern European “board” for Bulgaria should be realized by local as well as international policymakers and not by foreign countries, alliances or international organizations. The impact on local development of the elites of friendly nations is mediated by the strategists they send out. This influence is focused only on positive cultural messages and alternatives of governance. In no way can this “strategic board” intervene in the government of the state.

The authority of the strategic board is grounded primarily in its credibility, neutrality and consent. It would assist political governments systematically on regular basis, providing concepts and ideas of a cooperative future. The board’s basic functions would be the:

- creation of alternative scenarios for the distant future in a non-politicized context,
- construction of a grand-strategic framework on this basis,
- work with local governments on emerging issues as they relate to the strategic framework, and
- stimulation of best governance practices by establishing a special Prize of the Club, giving strategic research grants, etc.

Dialogue with the governments is most essential and it should be properly institutionalized. The strategic board should be recognized simultaneously in Bulgaria and the Western democracies. This would make its advice more instrumental.

## **The method**

### *Methodology always follows the core idea.*

Grand strategy is unattainable if the method of planning is applied to its formation by an organization appointed by the government, political party or other governmental institution: planning is as inappropriate as the political assignment is in this case. It is another question that power institutions must be involved in strategizing on a reasonable scale at the beginning and the end of each cycle of the process. Politics plays a constructive role, however only in the boundaries of its competency.

On the other hand, grand strategy is possible, viable and useful, if created by a policy network. The mode of formation of modern public policies in democratic societies can serve as a good basis for the constitution of expert-political mechanisms for development of strategic scenarios.

Generally speaking, policy networks that design programs for the solution of public problems almost invariably consist of agents of the three regulating spheres – the public, private and civil sectors. This is not all. Best public management practices in democracies show that it is extremely important that a expert teams are employed as well. Each of these segments of policy networks take part in adding their expertise while at the same time being released from the functions for which they have insufficient capacity.

In this context, the representatives of government institutions concerned with solving public problems are good in transforming ideas into administrative decisions and structures. No public policy could be fully formed and accomplished otherwise. Moreover, this is not a single central government office but rather all state institutions concerned with the solution of a particular problem that must be represented in a policy network. Such an interagency committee should further cooperate with the the two auxiliary groups within the network consisting of representatives of the private and civil sectors.

As it is well known, businessmen create the most effective algorithms and secure resources, which is important in times of austerity and crisis. Even more important is that policy must serve business and therefore the opinion of business people should be considered at an early

stage when public policies just emerge. At the same time participating NGOs related to the problems being solved contribute by finding fair solutions and securing openness and accountability of the entire process of policy formation.

Neither the governmental institutions nor the private and civil organizations have maximum expertise and know-how enabling them to find expert solutions. Therefore policy networks include special expert boards as well. They are good at generating ideas, algorithms and texts that the rest of participants assess, adjust and complete. And, finally, policy networks should give floor to international advisory boards. The latter have a dual function. On one hand, international experts, foreign political figures, business leaders and public activists add their international experience. On the other hand, policies gain more international legitimacy this way. This is important in the era of globalization and even more so for countries that are members of alliances bound by strong commitments to harmonize and synchronize their policies with community policies.

It can be assumed that expert panels and international boards are even more important for the process of strategy formation than for designing particular policies. First, the creation of grand strategy is an intellectual effort of the highest category which requires not only high levels of expertise but also special insight, intuition and humanity. Second, unlike public policy formation resulting in a given management program, the development of grand strategy is a continuous process involving permanent reflection on politics and governance in a country. Therefore, expert panels and international boards play a major role here, perhaps exceeding the importance of the role played by any other segment of the network.

In this respect, there is a big difference between public policy networks and strategy networks developing grand strategy. Bulgaria already has capacity and experience in policy networking but not with strategy networks. One reason is that the civil and private sectors are not sufficiently prepared to participate in strategic networks. The main gap is within the state sector because it is too tied to politics (parties, government, mandates) and barely to strategy (the area beyond politics – the welfare of future generations and the nation as a whole).

The idea of strategic networks may seem quite new and in some ways competitive with “pure” policy networking. The institutionalization of such an expert panel for the formation and development of a grand-strategic framework for Bulgaria and the region can be perhaps best implemented as a think-tank.

The product that is to be created is very special and therefore it requires a unique solution for its institutionalization. First and foremost, this product is multiple rather than unitary (a “bundle” of different scenarios rather than a complete plan). It is also infinite (creative efforts have no clearly identifiable ultimate goal as in all other management situations). Furthermore, this product is multivaried (it involves a constant evolution of ideas rather than one single achievement). The product is conceptual (the task is to rationalize governance, not to run the state).

This is why all traditional kinds of expert panels which are characterized by high degrees of formalization of internal links and robust structure are pretty much irrelevant in this case. The socio-political art of strategizing requires both maximum freedom for the individual participants (individuality) and, conversely, overwhelming internal motives of each participant to work for meaningful collective decisions (cooperativeness). Clearly, only elite forms of expert creativity possess these qualities.

It can be generalized that the generation of a Bulgarian grand strategy is achievable via regular functioning of a free elite think-tank – a strategic Club for the European future of Bulgaria in the Balkans and the Black Sea region – therefore a “B-Club”.

This Club shall unite the expertise and good will of Bulgarian, European and other high-ranking experts and statesmen ready to help the Bulgarian nation and the wider Balkan and Black Sea region. These would be prominent, creative figures with proven skills and valuable

achievements, friendly to the country and the region, possessing a strong sense for the future. Their work so far should have positive impact on the lives of significant human communities. Bulgarian and foreign macroeconomists, philosophers, writers and futurologists, sociologists, bankers, financial analysts, cultural anthropologists, psychologists, journalists, freelancers, experts, etc. would unite in such a strategic club. Just as an example, appropriate figures from abroad who fit the B-Club concept and who have rendered neutral support of Bulgaria in one way or the other are professor Steve Hanke, Jean-Claude Juncker, Helmut Kohl, George Friedman, Leszek Balcerowicz, Umberto Eco, Hayk Kotanjian, etc.

Participants in the B-Club should not be involved in the governance of the country be it in the past, present or future. It is inappropriate to have political party officials from Bulgaria and abroad as members of the club. The portrait of the strategic club member depicts him or her as a politically neutral, valuable thinker, humanist and philanthropist, however also responsible realist and creative futurist, a person with passion and unwavering consistency in his or her decision to help Bulgaria and the region, despite the possible obstructions of some local or foreign politicians against the development of a grand strategy for Bulgaria. This figure should have no desire for direct impact on Bulgaria's political life.

The B-Club does not work only for Bulgaria, the Balkans and the Black Sea region. It functions also in turn for the sake of the West and even Asia, i.e. for the countries from which the foreign members come. The Club creates strategic ideas that contribute in no small degree to the rediscovering of South-Eastern Europe by the world. It generates strategic ideas for profitable international contacts. It revives the family of Eastern European and Caucasian cultures, making them full-scale partners is a strategic task valuable not only to those nations, but to the world economy and security as a whole. Participation in that Club is a meaningful task for democratic elites, both local and foreign.

The principles that set the ground for the strategic Club for the sake of the success of its mission are at least these:

- *Morality* - the values, uniquely national as well as universally democratic, are the starting point for the formation of grand strategy. The reinforcement of these values is the permanent goal in any cycle of development of a strategic idea. They all make sense in the consolidation of a modern European identity for Bulgaria and the wider Balkan and Black Sea region.

- *Consent* – neither the utopia called consensus nor its opposite – political power – is a suitable basis for lasting, positive, constructive relationships in favor of the national and international communities as a whole. On the contrary, it is consent, national and international, that is the real groundwork for the European grand strategy for Bulgaria.

- *Fairness* – long-term solutions are stable only if they are fair. Europe has many times been the victim of its own unjust decisions that led to war, destruction and significant stagnation. Fairness is not an abstract “equal treatment of equals” but unequal treatment of the unequal, provided that a strategic formula is found ensuring the best possible future for each of the interconnected parties, be it winning or losing. Justice for the people is not only historical, emanating from the past. It is rather even more prospective.

- *Neutrality* – the strategic Club cannot take part in specific situations and take sides in political confrontation, support specific interpretations of facts and other partial or temporary solutions. Its mission is different: the best mutual future for the posterity of generations to come.

- *Generosity* – The European Renaissance is based on this principle and it should not be underestimated in our rationalistic present day, especially if the intention is the resurrection of a nation and region. The Club consists of well-wishers and not just experts. The spirit of humanity and sympathy is the prerequisite for the triumph of that “more” which grand Strategy alone can secure for the distant future when compared to any policy, plan or project.

Once the strategic Club proves to be working well, it can be expanded over time to the wider Balkans and Black Sea region.

### **The strategic B-Club “Euxinograd”**

In certain aspects, this strategic Club shares common features with existing “clubs” around the world that are strategizing at the highest level. The shape and design they have is very suitable to collective innovative creativity of the elites and can be adapted. The regular meetings of these clubs usually take place at special residences of symbolic value like Camp David or hotel “Bilderberg.” The quiet, isolated from the outer world atmosphere is the common identification framework of such clubs. This character is difficult to explain, but easy to understand. As far as the Bulgarian – Balkan – Black Sea Club is an elite creative organization for strategic innovation, it repeats many of the features of the elite political clubs throughout the world.

Given the similarity of functions, it is most appropriate for it to be identified with a location of adequate symbolic significance for the Bulgarian, Balkan and Black Sea area. Presumably, the most suitable place with such character could be the Euxinograd Black Sea residence<sup>12</sup>. This aristocratic 120-year-old government complex, secluded in its own lavish park along the coastline, just minutes away from the ancient and modern port city of Varna has been known in Europe for a long time. Its location and history make it more a symbol of the whole area stretching from the Danube to the Caucasus and from Yalta to Istanbul rather than a façade of the Bulgarian government in Sofia<sup>13</sup>. The complex includes the oldest and one of the best Bulgarian wineries as well.

However, unlike most elite strategic clubs in the world, the B-Club is not a club of top ranking politicians and heads of state. Its deliberations and decisions are open to the public, its products are intended for practical use in Bulgaria and elsewhere. The “Bulgarian” club does not solve issues or power, positions or personalities. This specific feature distinguishes it significantly from typically political clubs like “Bilderberg”. The mission and design of the Bulgarian – Balkan – Black Sea club is centered around expertise. Therefore this particular club also resembles a “think tank” like Hudson<sup>14</sup> or Brookings<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, it aims at providing large-scale practical recommendations that advance three general goals: (1) strengthening democracy in Bulgaria, the Balkans and the Black Sea region, (2) fostering economic and social welfare, and (3) paving the road for security and cooperation.

In this “non-Bilderberg” capacity, the Club is simultaneously (1) an elite think-tank dedicated to innovative solutions made during annual meetings that promote security and prosperity for Bulgaria in the Balkans and the Black Sea region and (2) a nonpartisan, independent policy research institution that forecasts trends and develops governance algorithms for Bulgaria, the Balkans and beyond. It would function in many different but mutually complementing ways.

The basic format of the B-Club are its general annual meetings, as is with all other political clubs. These meetings systematize and direct the work of the Club in general. Cardinal strategic ideas as well as key issues of the Club’s organizational life are discussed during these annual meetings. Thus the Club functions as a self-regulating strategic think-tank that draws scenarios and generates ideas about the future of Bulgaria and the region.

The second and broader area of the Club’s activities is alternative to its general meetings. Data collection, research, expert opinion polls, practical advice formulation and direct work with

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<sup>12</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euxinograd>; Official website: <http://www.euxinograd.bg/>

<sup>13</sup> The capital city Sofia is some 500 kilometers to the West from Euxinograd.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.hudson.org/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/about#research-programs/>

governments and political parties require more structured and permanently functioning organizational forms.

In other words, the B-Club would require between its regular general meetings the organization of sociological, political and economic research, secondary data analysis and, more important, brainstorming sessions with members, etc. The application of Delphi techniques to organized forms of scenario planning involving Club members ranks first in this segment of activities. The most progressive forms of long-term strategizing suggest a combination of scenario planning and the Delphi method<sup>16</sup>.

Moreover, unlike “pure” elite clubs, this one will need to develop intensively specific strategic documents, various statements as well as materials for publishing and web-page support. Links with local universities, private research and analytical organizations, European and international research centers are inevitable. Club members would cooperate directly or indirectly with local and foreign scientists, researchers and analysts. This implies the existence of a permanent working body of the B-Club.

Finally, apart from the core and peripheral functions of the Club, the organization of the entire work should be done by an elected Steering Committee, or Secretariat. It would organize all activities of the Club. The Committee, or Secretariat, should be headed by an Executive president elected by the members. All regulations should find place in the B-Club bylaws to be drafted by the Initiative Committee and approved by the first General Meeting.

The structure of the B-Club should therefore be concentric. The core consists of the club members. The periphery contains the Club’s permanent working analytical unit supported by temporarily engaged experts within particular projects of the Club. This structure connects the narrow elite-expert function with the broad research and analytical periphery that contributes with its information and legitimating function.

The task of the Club’s core is the formation and development of grand-strategic framework for Bulgaria, primarily the long-term ideas and scenarios for the future supporting the strategic framework. The members of the Club who form its core participate in the Annual Meeting as well as in the creative expert sessions, primarily Brainstorming and Delphi. The number of Club members shall not exceed one that guarantees its best performance and preserves its elite character. This number should be determined by the participants in the first Annual Meeting on the basis of a proposal made in advance by the International Initiative Committee for the establishment of the Club. This session must approve the rules for membership and ways of recruiting new members preferably on the grounds of consensus.

The ongoing projects of the B-Club should be supported by local and international institutions of the private, state and civil sector. The Club would have contractual relationship with academic and research organizations. Therefore the Club should act as a legal entity.

The Club activities would be supported financially by foundations (the B-Club might set up its own special foundation “ Euxinograde Club”), Bulgarian and international business, central and local authorities in Bulgaria, international finance institutions, etc.

The Club should be launched by an International Initiative Committee. Its formation is step one. It would carry out an initial brainstorming session to generate a clear-cut proposal, identify and invite potential participants in the Club, create drafts for the incorporation documents, establish initial relationships with universities, private and civil society organizations in Bulgaria and abroad.

For generating initial ideas, developing versions as well as securing initial information needed for the formation of the Club, a pilot brainstorming session should be conducted with Bulgarian experts.

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<sup>16</sup> von der Gracht, H. A., Darkow, I.-L. [Scenarios for the Logistics Service Industry: A Delphi-based analysis for 2025](#).

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