

DILMA ROUSSEFF AND THE GODLY GIFTS FOR A DIPLOMATIC RENAISSANCE

By Solomon Passy



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The current Bulgarian government has been blessed by God: it is the first in the past 20 years that does not need to negotiate for EU membership but only to take advantage of it. And to invest in reforms the governance capacity that was freed from the accession negotiations, especially in diplomacy and foreign policy, which after NATO and the EU accessions need new goals. The time has come in Bulgaria for a large-scale foreign policy reform (FPR) – ever a renaissance.

God has also sent us a catalyst for a FPR stipulated by the Lisbon Treaty: the European External Action (i.e. diplomatic) service, which will reload and motivate the diplomatic corps of the EU member states.

The major goal of Bulgaria's FPR should be to remove urgently the political impotence which prevents Bulgaria from capitalizing on its golden chances that have been created hard and for a long time. Some of the hundreds of examples include: the neglected Russian market; China (where Bulgaria is revered as the second state in the world to recognize the People's Republic of China); the countries that Bulgaria funded generously before 1989 or educated thousands of their students such as Vietnam and many others in Asia, Africa, the Arab world, Latin America (they remember us with gratitude); and then there is the present when we invested into both forces and combat equipment in Afghanistan and Iraq in order to open up these markets (including their defense markets), yet not for Bulgaria (!) but for third countries which had even been skeptical with respect to the international efforts there.

The third gift for a FPR will be pronounced on January 1, 2011: Dilma Rousseff – President of Brazil. But let's not allow this one to slip away as many others have before concluding one day, "well, that was a great opportunity but we missed it." We need reforms that will stimulate massive Brazilian investments in

Bulgaria. And this requires more work (not necessarily before cameras and microphones[1]). The crisis necessitates reforms which our imagination has never even fathomed before. Even the most brilliant Bulgarian ambassador to be sent to Brazil will be powerless without them.

Brazil is not just Rio de Janeiro but a federation of 26 states. It is 5th in the world in terms of territory (after Russia, Canada, China and the USA) and 5th in terms of population (after China, India, the USA, and Indonesia). Brazil is No. 1 in terms of competitiveness growth, and harbors the perspective of becoming fourth in terms of GDP (after India, the USA, and China. In 1931, Russian writers Iif and Petrov summarize the communist reality in the Soviet Union with the catch phrase "Нет, это не Рио-де-Жанейро, это гораздо хуже" [*], which turns Brazil into a symbol of everything wonderful taken away by communism. But in 2011, a FPR could turn Bulgaria into a Rio de Janeiro, even if 80 years after Iif and Petrov.

The post-Euro-Atlantic renaissance of the Bulgarian diplomacy goes through its urgent and large-scale change of focus towards economy and pragmatism. Here are 12 simple but key steps of the FPR:

1) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be transformed into a Ministry of Foreign and External Economic Policies (MFEP) with the respective structural and staff changes. (There are similar good practices in Canada, Belgium, South Korea, New Zealand, etc.) Note that the last word is "policies" – this is what we need instead of the amorphous "affairs" or "relations." In fact, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must grow to become a Ministry of Foreign and External Economic Policies and EU Development Policy (a long name but one that reflects adequately this portfolio: see 9) below);

2) The Foreign Minister must also become a Deputy Prime Minister with the above-mentioned portfolio. With all my due respect to all the other portfolios and ministers, only the Foreign Minister can utilize and command adequately the diplomatic network abroad.

3) The Prime Minister should appoint in the MFEP a special Minister of External Economic Policy (he will be a kind of a Deputy Deputy Prime Minister) under the leadership of the Foreign Minister, who will formulate the economic priorities of the diplomatic corps – region by region, including in Latin America and Brazil, and will coordinate the inter-institutional efforts on that portfolio. (South Korea's experience will be of help here.

4) The FPR should formulate a niche for Bulgaria, a specialization within the EU. This niche should include, for example, a number of countries which harbor good feelings towards Bulgaria from its pre-democracy period: from Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia, and North Korea, and Sudan, Mozambique, Angola, and Cape Verde, all the way to Cuba, Chile, and Nicaragua. And some of these can be a bridge in the relations with rising global colossi such as ASEAN in East Asia [2] or Mercosur in Latin America. So instead of closing down existing embassies, Bulgaria needs to do the opposite: to open new ones and to reinforce urgently the missions located in promising economic destinations.

Another, innovative technological field in which we created a good reputation and potential for Bulgaria – which still haven't been utilized – is electronic standardization (**). A small Bulgarian team in which my wife Gergana Passy (then Minister for EU Affairs) and I participated – managed to get through the European Commission, and then on a global level, the standardization of mobile phone chargers after 2010 – an innovation with a global economic and environmental impact. Bulgaria can now Bulgaria a spokesperson for the EU on eco-design and climate change issues. If it wishes...

One of the reasons the missed benefits – both from EU membership and diplomacy as a whole – the lack of Minister for EU Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFEP). He/she should support the Minister in the exponential growth of EU commitments and topics which are being transformed from foreign to Bulgaria to internal for the EU.

Actually, it is the time for us to propose that the EU should send a Bulgarian as its ambassador in Brazil. Or at least a deputy ambassador, if an ambassador is too much to ask.

5**) Another neglected golden opportunity is our agreement with Spain (Minister Moratinos and I signed it in 2005), which generously provides the shelter of every single Spanish Embassy in the world to Bulgarian diplomats. This know-how only has to be utilized and then multiplied with other strategic partners – such as Italy, for example.

6**) A massive deployment of the network of Bulgaria's military diplomacy. During my official visit to Montenegro in 2008, I proposed to the governments of the two countries that we should modify the Bulgarian-Spanish know-how by providing the services of the Bulgarian diplomatic corps, and especially of the military diplomatic corps to the young state. Back then both governments (as well as our allies) applauded the idea but that was about it. The crisis is a fresh occasion to make our ideas happen – and not just with one single country – especially because we can find funding for that.

7**) The government should update and apply the 2005 Strategy of the Foreign Ministry for the creation of an Agency for the Diplomatic Properties Abroad (ADPA), which should provide long-term funding for the FPR. Bulgaria owns hundreds – including neglected – properties abroad worth billions of euro. If utilized to the fullest, they will turn into a printing press for money, whereas at present – just like every neglected property – they are an abyss for squandering money. Towards the end of my ministerial term (after I had done my homework on NATO, the EU, the OSCE, the UN Security Council, the visit of Pope John Paul II, etc), I proposed to our government – and it accepted it – a strategy for the creation of ADPA, which would manage and capitalize on these properties. We left this completed strategy to those who came after us but again without success.

8) The potential of the Bulgarian EU Commissioner. The government has not managed to gain added value from the portfolio (consumer protection) and the successes of our first EU Commissioner. Let's

learn the lesson and fix that with the second one: Bulgaria can establish a regional center for fighting disasters and crises (or for recruiting volunteers) without waiting for distant EU candidates to overtake us in that regard.

9**) Development aid is a major instrument in EU's foreign policy in which the Union invests EUR 50 B annually. The Bulgarian commitment to this EU policy is about BGN 110 M annually, and it will grow [5]. This money – comparable to the budget of the entire Foreign Ministry – is now spent ad hoc (with the petty hopes that we can avoid its spending) have no added value. However, given the right planning, it will generate long-term returns. An example in hand: scholarships for foreign students in Bulgarian universities will be direct support for the education in Bulgaria as well as a long-term investment in our relations with the respective parts of the world.

10) In the last 50-60 years the Big Missed Opportunity in Bulgaria's external economic policy is Israel. The Bulgarian heroism which saved almost 50 000 Jews during World War II lives on in the Israeli society and nurtures trust that other nations have to create for decades. Israel is a global technological, economic, and innovation leader that is ahead of the USA, the EU, India, China, Japan, Brazil, or South Korea in many respects. We have often had occasions to admire the Israeli economic miracle. But why aren't we taking advantage of it! Bulgaria could benefit tremendously from its cooperation with Israel in IT, innovation technologies, agriculture, defense, etc. Unfortunately, here as well our foreign and economic policies are in a sad discordance. In comparison, Greece, which has just warmed up its relations with Israel after decades of freeze, is already enjoying their benefits, and created close contacts, including militarily, that we have proposed to Bulgaria since 2009! But the Greeks realized that the crisis is a good reason to start thinking differently.

11**) We are in need – for 20 years already – of a "Bulgaria" Information Agency that should advertise in a coordinated fashion the culture, achievements, opportunities and advantages of our country, similarly to the Sofia Press agency back in the days. (Many of our allies have had such institutions for promotion for a long time.) This Agency can united the potential of existing structures (for example the Bulgarian information agency BTA) but it will be most efficient as part of the Foreign Ministry. [4]

12**) Our new, visible foreign policy priorities, much in the spirit of the FPR, should be Bulgaria's membership in the OECD, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the global club of rich nations. Admission there is granted after serious reforms that lead to prosperity, whether you want it or not. Our OECD aspiration will fill up much of the post-Euro-Atlantic vacuum in our diplomacy that appeared on January 1, 2007. Even though the work on completing Bulgaria's accession to Schengen and the euro zone is important, it is not sufficient for that.

The above program, FPR, can be entitled "Through Diplomacy to Prosperity" and the crisis is not an obstacle for its implementation, to the contrary – it is a reason for its emergency application. This is a self-financing strategy with enormous returns. Saving money from diplomacy because of the crisis is counter-productive – it is like fighting inflation by printing money.

In 2001-2005, while I was toiling in the accession negotiations with NATO and the EU, I sometimes got asked, "Aren't you afraid that you might turn us in the 51st state of the USA in this hurry?" This, however, was not on our agenda. Yet, I was thinking: that way we will get two Bulgarians in the Senate, some more in the House, and potentially a vice-presidential seat, and a cosmonaut with NASA, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, in the G-8 and G-20, we will be guaranteed an annual visit by the US President, a removal of US visas, all American military bases around the world would become ours, there will be an invasion of US investments and tourists (but no longer as foreign tourists), a silicon valley around the Ivaylovgrad water reservoir, etc, etc. What is more, if more of the 27 EU member states do the same, Europe will be able to re-colonize America in a peaceful way, which will harden the trans-Atlantic connection. Indeed, the convergence between the EU and the USA is yet to enter more intimate phases but let us first do the urgent tasks.

Today, with the election of Dilma Rousseff we can easily guarantee the privilege of being a virtual 27th state of Brazil, which could be its live connection with the EU. And a President such as Dilma will return to us the hope that if Bulgarians can govern Brazil well, they will probably govern Bulgaria well, too. Some day!

(**) The ideas described in items 5,6,7,9,11 and 12, I tried to get through many times during the term of the previous government but to no avail despite my position as the Chair of Foreign Policy Committee in Parliament. Apparently, the right ideas require both the right time and the right people. Hopefully, they have arrived.

[*] No, this is not Rio de Janeiro, this is something much worse.

[1] Let it be clear immediately: I do not mean PR under reforms (I don't denounce it, I just don't mean that!). Each one of our three highest state leaders will have a reason to ask to stand next to Dilma during her ceremony: the President – because she is a President; the Prime Minister – because she is the head of the executive; and the Parliament Chair – because she is a woman. Let's not forget in the fuss also the Mayor of Gabrovo, of course – he will be welcoming her with salt and bread when she visits Etara in 1-2 years.

[2] Brunei, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines.

[3] Here we can cite the example of France which in the times of gravest crises focuses on two priorities: culture and diplomacy. Or Turkey which is now opening 18 new embassies around the world – 14 in Africa and 4 in Latin America. All in all, diplomatic work is a delicate business (it is not like a chain of stores for fruits and vegetables where you can open a store today, shut it down tomorrow, and the reopen it the day after.) In this field ties and traditions take decades to be cultivated and days to be destroyed.

[4] I know that after each one of the above suggestions people will ask the question about how to fund them. Even though I mentioned potential sources, I will also provide several examples from my work to

show that such ideas actually function. In 2001-2005, we opened – primarily by restructuring institutional budgets but also with outside funding – general consulates in Shanghai, Milano, Los Angeles, and Chicago as well as several in Russia; embassies in Podgorica, Prishtina, Dublin, Ljubljana, and Canberra (upgrade). We opened two institutes at the Foreign Ministry – a diplomatic institute and a cultural institute, which was the first Bulgarian national museum opened after 1981. The secret of this diplomatic boom did not lie with additional funding but with the great moral and intellectual support that I received by the entire team of the government of Simeon Saxe-Coburg – which could create miracles in diplomacy today.

[5] This is an extremely far-sighted policy of the EU, fighting poverty, war and other tragedies around the world before their consequences can hit us directly. In other words, it is better to pay for putting out the fire at your neighbor's before it gets to your house.