

Op-Ed

Missed question to Chancellor Merkel



By PËRPARIM KALO*

As a participant in the 8th German-Albanian Economic Conference taking place in Tirana Business Park, a prestigious German investment, and coinciding with the visit of Chancellor Merkel in Albania, I was sharing the view of overwhelming majority of Albanians that the relations between the Republic of Albania and the Federal Republic of Germany are strong, at a high level, which makes one feel optimistic that Germany will continue to be a strategic partner.

We witness how dynamics of agenda of multinational organizations or structures often change swiftly, and how

this can have an impact on the bilateral relationships, thus making them shrink, as overshadowed by priorities that initiatives or multilateral programs take at a certain moment in time. This can happen in the case of Berlin Process, too, a project inspired and heavily supported by Chancellor Merkel and German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, aiming at the involvement of the Western Balkan countries, as a whole, in the reforming and EU integration processes.

I use this opportunity to bring my personal experience, in this context, some 10 years ago. In 2003, with some colleagues from the region, with whom we have cooperated for years on issues or international clients having interests in the markets of our region, KALO & ASSOCIATES from Albania, namely BOYANOV from Bulgaria, NNDKP from Romania, SELIH from Slovenia, DTB from Croatia and KN from Serbia, we decided to found the South East Europe Legal Group - SEE LEGAL (www.seelegal.org), as a well organized professional regional structure, aiming to providing legal services in the whole region in question. SEE LEGAL map was immediately completed with law firms MARIC from Bosnia and Herzegovina, KG from Greece, POLENAK from Macedonia, KOLCUOĞLU from Turkey and today it is

considered as the largest legal services provider in the region, employing over 400 professional lawyers. Irrespective of our tremendous efforts we spent in the last 12 years to provide integrated services as SEE LEGAL under the motif One Region - One Service, we are aware that processes of integration take time, so we are continuing to work hard in that direction.

I brought this example not only to say that the idea of sharing interests in joint formations and projects is implemented in various fields as an instrument of cooperation and, is quite beneficial. Today a big concern can be the risk associating involvement in such projects, as often they make one believe everything works fine, as long as projects have the support from international actors and factors, thus "park", or completely leave behind, in the worst scenario, the individual reforming actions "within home". In other words, intensification of efforts for involvement in bilateral projects, especially with the powers that influence the policy decision-making of organizations and multilateral structures, is needed.

The way big chancelleries of Europe operate today, creates the impression that the mighty allies, who we would very much like to be our "guardian angels",

and cherish us as "the sugar baby", i.e. "special loving child", they do not have as much time to deal with us individually, but equally as any other country in the framework of multilateral projects. Therefore today it is required, in addition to special efforts to take the maximum benefits from opportunities offered by the projects of a regional nature, to continue finding ways how to increase economic interest of powerful countries, in this case Germany, for Albania, thus trying to cause our largest donor, to become also the largest investor. The minimum that can be done is to learn from lessons of the past. We should not take "the luxury" to let investors of a big caliber, go back home, as happened in the past with RWE, Berlinwasser, ThyssenKrupp, etc. but we should try our best to give them all necessary guarantees.

The way the country is being governed by the Prime Minister Rama and the comprehensive reforms undertaken to ensure legal certainty, makes me believe we would hear a "Yes" from Chancellor Merkel, if the missed question "Will Germany be Albania's biggest economic partner" had been raised.

Përparim Kalo is the managing partner at the Kalo and Associates law firm

BOOKS

'Pit Bulls and Butterflies: Stories from a nation at crossroads'

A work of journalism, "Pit Bulls and Butterflies" is a must-read book for those seeking to better understand Albania and Albanians in the global context, says the author, A. D. Balla.

Here is the full chapter list for the book and what each deals with:

Meatball Capitalism

A look at the immediate changes after the fall of communism in Albania around the 1991-1992 period.

Pit Bulls and Butterflies

Albania celebrates 100 years of independence trying to cope with its past and looking for a better future.

Building Pyramids

Albania's experience with massive national Ponzi pyramid schemes. When they inevitably fell, a national armed revolt followed, bringing down the government.

A Nation at War

The Kosovo War and post-war Kosovo: The new country's people, Diaspora and economic outlook.

Sons in America

Looks at the large Albanian Diaspora in North America and its influence on the land of its roots.

The Shrinking Nation

Explores Albania's coming demographic crisis.

Turkish Soaps

Investigates Turkey's growing interest and power in Albania and the region.

Greeks Bearing Gifts

Explores Albania's complex relations with its southern neighbor.

In the Footsteps of Sul Pasha

Explains how massive internal migration transformed Tirana, Albania's once sleepy capital.

The Business of Education

Sheds light how greed and lack of standards by private 'universities' dealt a blow to the future of many young Albanians.

There Goes the Neighborhood

Explains the implication of the Eurozone crisis – in Greece and Italy in particular – for Albania.

Better Off at Home?

Looks at the trend of Albanian migrants returning home as a result of the global economic crisis.

Painting the Country

Explores the recent generational shift in Albania's leadership.

Greener Pastures

The story of Lazarat, where the Albanian government recently destroyed massive marijuana plantations worth billions of dollars.

All Roads Lead to Brussels

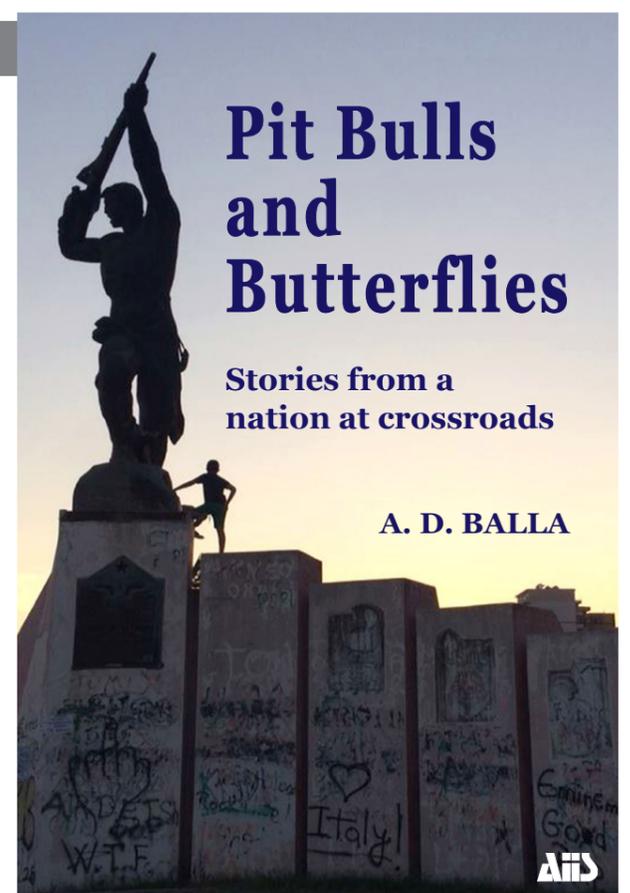
A critical look at Albania's hopes of joining the European Union.

The Better Angels

On Albania's religious harmony and ultra-liberal approach to matters of faith.

Present Meets the Future

An attempt to predict the likely long-term outcome of current trends in Albania.



The book's author has worked as a reporter and editor in North America and the Balkans since 2002. He is one of the most experienced journalists currently covering Albania and Albanians for international audiences.

Published by A.I.S., the hard copy of the books is available in Albania wherever international books and press are sold, including at the Tirana Times Book House. Internationally, the hard copy book can be found online at ShtepiaLibrit.com, and will soon be available through Amazon.

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