

THE BALKANS LIKE A MAGNET FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS

Serbia has been at the top of the world for several years when it comes to attracting foreign direct investment. Our intense and persistent efforts to seek investors, global marketing and faith in Balkan countries such as Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, and Northern Macedonia have proven to be very successful, according to Uve Cirbes, Chairman of the Board of GCI UNIT.

This German by origin, who in the opinion of his clients is known as a real "magnet" for attracting foreign direct investment, stresses in an interview for our magazine that he will not overdo it if he says that Serbia is, on many issues, developing even faster than its native Germany. Many people will wonder whence in Serbia because many of the investors go West.

-I came to Belgrade for the first time in 2016 and was impressed with the city's beauty, as well as the people who live together, regardless of their different nationalities. If it wasn't for a special reason, and I'll explain to you, I probably would never have come to Belgrade because of negative prejudices and bad marketing about your country. But everything I heard through the media, everything that was written and said about this country over the years, everything negative, in the very short term, was completely transformed into a positive one. You need to see and experience the Balkans, especially Belgrade, Podgorica, Tirana and Skopje before you say anything about them.

That picture has now changed, as you say. When foreigners ask you about our region today, what do you tell them?

-Today, after three years of intensive work, I can confirm that in my opinion, as an internationally experienced businessman, who has already seen and met almost the whole world, this is a perfect place to live and invest, which is confirmed by many of my clients as direct investors. After only a few weeks of staying here, I knew this and informed my entire network of business people I work with. Also, I have conducted marketing worldwide - in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. At first, in the first two years, it was very difficult, because almost nobody knew where Serbia is. Many still thought it is in Africa and compared it to Zambia. My enlightenment work, let's call it that way, starting from scratch with many people.

Many of my colleagues and friends thought I was crazy, and people I talked to in Serbia asked me what I was doing here. Why did you come from Dubai to Serbia? Everybody wants to leave Serbia, and I'm coming here?!

So, the next question is obvious – what are you doing here?

As a businessman and a manager, I see things differently, and I find solutions easier because I am beyond that, and I look at things from the other side and more realistically. It is as if an experienced manager, an expert, would appear at some point when a company had no other way out and a different angle was needed to find a solution. If one's resources in a country are not sufficient to please the needs of citizens, they are required other managers, companies, top people who build something in their own country, who need to set up companies to find young talents and people to do a job, are needed. And that's what I've been doing all my life. With my then-just-established company, I helped more than 17,000 top managers and companies find a new challenge, thus freeing companies from their problems. And all over the world. For the past 26 years, I have built a network of corporations, large and medium-sized companies in China, the UAE, Asia and, of course, Europe. And through that collaboration, I gained insight into different cultures and mentalities. Of course, some people in Serbia were still dissatisfied with the situation in the country, they wanted to emigrate to Germany and other countries. But now I'm sure everyone will be back. Please don't get me wrong, I have nothing to do with politics, I don't want to have anything to do with politics and I certainly can't afford a professional judgment, but that is what my managerial experience tells me. I consider myself a neutral outsider, an open-minded businessman, and from my many years of global experience, I can say that Serbia has developed far better in the short term after communism, a time of corruption and war than any other country I know. If one wants to compare himself to Germany, then he must also account for the time that Germany needed after the war. Serbia has achieved this in half the time.

One would say that you are now exaggerating comparing Serbia and Germany.



- No, I'll go one step further. I can say that it is already predictable today that Germany is steeply descending, and Serbia will increasingly be attractive to foreign investors. Germany has 20 times more companies escaping annually, while Serbia has companies coming. The media doesn't even report on it. The people who invest in Serbia today, who stay there and those who develop and invest their inventions and ideas here, will be the winners. Everyone else will return to Serbia. And if some significant people bring some benefits to the state of Serbia and if they in any way fulfill the criteria under Article 19 of the Law on Citizenship, then they can also obtain the citizenship of your country, so they do not have to stay in the country for only 60 days like tourists, and they can already build their business, and grow it. I think it's a good idea and at this point, I should say it's my idea. I presented the proposal to the Government of Serbia, as well as the governments of Montenegro, Albania and Northern Macedonia. Unfortunately, to date, such a citizenship law that would be obtained by investing has not yet been adopted, except in Montenegro.

You say that you have presented your ideas in the countries of the region. What are the results?

-Especially in countries like Serbia and Northern Macedonia, as well as in Montenegro, I have been able to introduce investors to governments and to advertise these Balkan countries around the world, which I have done well. And that's exactly my goal - I want to take care of that and help with my influence and business network to get at least 20,000 people new jobs. I do not want to bring hundreds, but many more companies to the Balkans, making the Balkans stronger than ever. Every person should have a reason why he lives on this planet. We were all winners in the beginning, but we measure what we leave behind. I want to leave this world better than I found it; I want to make a difference. And I know from personal experience that you can achieve a lot if you believe in your goals and work to achieve them. I want young people to believe in themselves and their Serbia, as do investors and managers who come from the outside.

