

Serbia as a business location



We inherited the past as it is, without the right to shape it, but today we have the opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past and create a better Europe. We can only achieve this together and in agreement. The Europe we know today was created over millennia. We were united by peace and divided by wars, had ups and downs. My personal opinion, however, is that we have stopped at one point on this path of social development. Looking back over the period of the last 30 years, there are clear deficits in the continuity of Europe's economic and social development.

At a time when European societies are facing extremism, radicalism and divisions, it is more important than ever to strengthen rights, justice, and EU values and to defend human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and non-discrimination, and the rule of law: This will have a profound and direct impact on political, social, cultural and economic life in the EU.

The platform launched by the EU on 19 April is the multilingual HUB on the future of Europe and will enable citizens to shape the future of the Union. The EU institutions are committed to listening to people and acting on their recommendations. The EU has made it possible for all voices to be heard and for citizens to play a role in decision-making, notwithstanding the COVID 19 pandemic. European democracy, which is representative and participatory, will continue to work because it is essential for our common future.

However, I see the present moment as a great opportunity to create a stronger Europe, especially economically. This goal can only be achieved if every country within Europe is given the opportunity to develop and if we work on a common economic plan. We are on the right track and radical changes are taking place in European politics, especially at the time of COVID 19.

I refer again to our topic and Bavaria's bilateral economic relations with Serbia. I see great potential and opportunity for even stronger cooperation. I would like to emphasise in Bavaria that the most important goal for Serbia is to join the EU, and Germany supports it in this. New agreements on political, cultural and economic cooperation between Germany and Serbia are being signed all the time. Bavaria should follow these processes and not lag too far behind the other federal states. Each of the countries in Europe has its own geopolitical position and importance, which is unavoidable and independent of the current economic interdependence of the states. With regard to the context of today's conference, however, I would like to point out that Bavaria and Serbia must turn more towards each other and create even stronger economic interdependencies. Today more than ever, I see an enormous potential for development and cooperation in the Green Deal, the Green Economy and the Danube region.

Serbia's geopolitical importance for Europe is gigantic. Current clear strategic goals are a precedent in European politics that we must not lose sight of. I see today a space for cooperation of all present, regardless of all cultural and religious differences, which should not be an obstacle in creating a united Europe.

It is a well-known fact that Serbia has made great efforts to join the EU until today. It has fulfilled a large number of its obligations and enabled foreign companies to operate successfully on the territory of Serbia. Thanks to its regional importance, foreign companies have so far expanded their business policies on the territory of Serbia and in the region. However, I would like to point out a phenomenon here. Until now, Bavaria has been less aware of Serbia's potential, while foreign companies from outside Europe have taken advantage of this situation and opened a large number of their plants in Serbia, which for me, as a political scientist, is a disadvantage for Europe. It is up to us to stop this trend and focus more on our bilateral cooperation. We should not ignore this phenomenon, which can be a brake on the development of Europe, both economically and socially. Now is a very important moment for Bavaria to understand the importance of Serbia and not to neglect its geopolitical position in European politics.

Let me come back to the Green Deal and the current situation in the pandemic. The goals of the green economy are clear to us, the question is whether we want to adopt them or not. The need to transform the business of companies and the industrial sector is obvious. We should not be intimidated by these challenges. It is a long-term process where we will have the chance to create a new economy with our innovative ideas. Precisely because it is a process and we are at the very beginning of this process, we see our meeting as very important. We now have the opportunity to talk openly and to promote bilateral economic cooperation.

To address just one of the many aspects of cooperation, I would like to emphasise the importance of innovation, for a Europe to which both Bavaria and Serbia can contribute. Another important topic for all present is sustainable urban energy planning. Combating climate change is a priority for the EU. Taking the example of greenhouse gas emissions, I can already see a possible economic link between Bavaria and Serbia. Many companies from Bavaria could offer ready-made solutions for Serbia. Considering the fact that I am working on such a project, I know that Serbia is on its way to soon open up to all potential partners who have ready-made solutions for solar energy.

I would like to mention one more important issue. Although international aviation and shipping each account for less than 3.5 percent of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions, they are among the sectors with the fastest growing emissions contributing to climate change.

This is one of the reasons why efforts have only recently been made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in these sectors - both at EU and global level.

In a resolution adopted ahead of the COP25 climate summit, the European Parliament called for increased ambition to reduce emissions from aviation and shipping, for example by strengthening market-based measures. The involvement and commitment of society and all stakeholders is crucial to the success of the European Green Deal. Recent political events show that landmark policies only work if citizens are fully involved in shaping them.

I know that it is perhaps too early to talk about this now. But I stress, as always, the importance of international scientific cooperation in technological innovation, which I personally see as a sure way to connect Bavarian and Serbian companies.

The EU will reduce CO2 emissions by 55% by 2030, making Europe climate neutral by 2050. Where is Serbia located? As pollution is high in Serbia, I see opportunities for bilateral economic cooperation today. Through joint efforts, we can achieve concrete economic solutions by making a joint contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Serbia, throughout the Balkans and ultimately throughout Europe. Today, a large number of Bavarian companies can very successfully and quickly open their branches in Serbia and work together with experts from Serbia on innovations for the avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions and place them not only on the European but also on the world market due to the excellent price competitiveness. I see enormous potential for bilateral cooperation there. The EU institutions should facilitate cooperation between Serbia and Germany if the Green Deal is to be successful and bring about lasting change across Europe. Citizens are and should remain a driving force of the transition to Green Economy. The European Green Deal should become a common plan to make the EU economy sustainable.

Another fact that neither Serbia nor Bavaria should ignore is that on 12 May 2021 the European Commission adopted the EU Action Plan "Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil": - a key outcome of the European Green Deal and the main theme of this year's EU Green Week. This sets out a vision for 2050: a world in which pollution is reduced to levels that are no longer harmful to human health and natural ecosystems, and the steps to get there. The plan links all relevant EU pollution control and prevention policies, with a particular focus on the use of digital solutions. Reviews of relevant EU legislation are foreseen to identify remaining gaps in EU legislation and where better implementation is needed to meet these legal obligations. Bavaria can accompany Serbia on this path.

Following this, I would quickly highlight the following areas that can significantly improve bilateral cooperation with Serbia in technology and tourism.

1. Creation of a sustainable food system
2. Low-carbon and circular economy
3. Conservation, sustainable management and restoration of nature
4. Sustainable food production
5. Reduction of environmental pollution
6. Smart and green cities
7. Smart and green infrastructure
8. Numerous packages of European funds for sustainable development:
9. the pathways to financial support for Balkan countries are open and allow Serbia to make clearly visible developments.

10. EU Erasmus+ programme, the most successful initiative of the EU, which helps to open new opportunities for young people, including those from Serbia, and facilitates their access to the labour market.
11. We must not forget the importance of a European strategy for the Danube macro-region and remember that Serbia is a part of this strategy. This topic will be discussed at one of the next conferences this year.

I will end the report with the following words: we must defend our common values and uphold the rule of law. We need to find the means to achieve our ambitions. That is why we are here to talk about this and to build a strong Europe together, without wasting precious time.

Dragana Stojic