

Interview - Solomon Passy

Written by E-International Relations

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Solomon Isaac Passy is a Bulgarian scientist, statesman, and innovator. He is founder and President of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria, was Foreign Minister of Bulgaria during the Government of King Simeon II (2001-2005), and was Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2004. He represented Bulgaria at the UN Security Council (2002-2003) and was its Chairman (September 2002 and December 2003), and was nominated by the Bulgarian government for Secretary General of NATO (2008). As Foreign Minister, he negotiated and signed Bulgaria's accessions to NATO (2004) and the EU (2007) – projects which he himself initiated as Member of Parliament back in 1990. He and his team initiated the EU legislation for a universal GSM charger (2014) and #WiFi4EU (2009) which paves the way to universal public access to WiFi/Internet in EU territory.

Where do you see the most exciting research and debates happening in your field?

My field is a seemingly eclectic amalgam of mutually excluding domains such as science and programming, human rights and politics, innovations and governance, EU legislation, and the future in general. The common denominator of all these is, however, the human zeal for happiness. The most exciting developments here are the speed and acceleration of technologies and the development of the newest method of acquiring knowledge, known as BIG DATA, which could rationalize our approach to defining and achieving happiness.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time, and what or who prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

My worldview was originally shaped by family generations before me and later upgraded within my university circle in mathematical logic and computer sciences. During the communist period, I was inspired by Soviet and East European dissidents. Here in Bulgaria, we had inspiring opposition leaders united by Dr Zhelyu Zhelev, later elected as first democratic President of Bulgaria, with whom I continued to work until the very end of his days.

Some vision-shaping episodes are worth mentioning as well. A letter I received in 1985 from the great Friedensreich Hundertwasser, who was my idol in art, and my friendship with Manfred Wörner in early 1990s gave me a bigger scale of thinking and the dream to always try to expand it. Another person that has always been a role model for me is King Simeon II. In my youth, I never even dreamed that I would have the chance to work under his direct leadership, let alone that our teamwork would lead to the materialisation of our political dreams — memberships of Bulgaria in NATO and the EU. In more recent times, in 2007, an enlightening visit to Tibet opened my eyes to the concept of i-Democracy (see Dr. Passy's TEDx Talk in Dijon) which I know is the future of world governance and the real shortcut to everybody's happiness.

It has been thirteen years since Bulgaria joined NATO. What are the country's biggest contributions to the Alliance and what should the goals for the future be?

Bulgaria is among those allies who are exposed to bigger risks and are net providers of security in NATO's operations in the region and globally. I hope the upcoming Bulgarian Presidency of EU will help strengthen the NATO-EU and EU-US relations, which are critically needed nowadays. Bulgaria also serves as an influential think-tank recharging Europe and the West with fresh ideas like the creation of the first non-NATO Atlantic NGO and US-

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Bulgarian joint military facilities. Bulgaria even has contributions to some unexpected parts of the world, like bringing Mongolia into OSCE and NATO's orbit and successfully mediating with North Korea to dismantle part of their nuclear infrastructure, which temporarily slowed down their nuclear programme.

Bulgaria will hold the Presidency of the European Council from January 2018. What effect might that have on the Balkans, and specifically Macedonia, and the Black Sea Region?

We shall be as proactive as possible, but a single Presidency cannot do miracles. The key to Macedonia's future success is the agreement with Greece and lasting warmer relations with all of its neighbours – this should be prioritised. Regarding the Black Sea, we need stronger NATO military presence there and engagement of more non-Black Sea NATO nations. A NATO naval base on the Bulgarian coast would somewhat balance the overwhelming Russian military presence in this Sea and reduce levels of risk in the region.

Do you think a restructuring of NATO is needed? Should more emphasis be put on regional alliances?

We need a restructuring of the West as a whole. We should not underestimate the emerging second geopolitical pole centered around the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Geopolitics is starting to widen the gap between the West and the Rest. We, the West, should focus on deepening and prioritizing our internal relationships — military, economic, political, and environmental – in order to prevent our disintegration, of which no decent player on the planet would benefit. At the same time we need a new comprehensive approach to China, which, in particular, should include the creation of a NATO-China Council, as pointed out by us a decade ago.

How can NATO find the correct balance between increasing its influence and maintaining good relations with its neighbours, particularly Russia?

Russia and the West have more common interests and common enemies than what divides us today. We, the West, and Russia, should define a common target: long run membership of Russia in NATO, to which end Russia should undergo several reforms. If this is agreed the rest is a matter of an action plan with a checklist.

How do you see NATO evolving in the coming decades?

Internal processes in the US and EU do not help globalization, so we need at this moment to strengthen Europe militarily. Moreover, Europe should take the lead in rehabilitating the trans-Atlantic bond in smart ways. When isolationism prevails in the US, it is Europe who should penetrate the US market of ideas with new trans-Atlantic know-how. In parallel, we need to grab new opportunities. One such is to brainstorm mid-term membership of Cuba in NATO, after some obvious reforms which are underway. This — seemingly small — third American leg of the trans-Atlantic bridge will be a game changer in geopolitics between the West and BRICS.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of International Relations?

International, human and all other relations become progressively dependent on digitization and computerization. Therefore my advice: start programming and gaming! i-Democracy is the future of the world, so rush into the future rather than staying in the present which is already in the past.

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This interview was conducted by Alex Tanchev. Alex Tanchev is an Associate Features Editor at E-International Relations.