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Assoc. Prof. Miroslav Tityanov at 50!

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On the occasion of this personally exciting life event, the well-known manager in the domestic agrarian business agreed to give a special interview for the readers of the magazine "Plant Protection", in which he speaks about certain characteristics of his behavioural and professional profile, about his attitude and principled positions on key topics in the market environment. Interview by Vesela Shishkova.

- ***Assoc. Prof. Tityanov, your interesting professional career so far includes 5 remarkable highlights – the youngest manager, at the age of 27 you take over the management of the representative office in Sofia of the American agrochemical company Dow AgroSciences, later in 2000 you also***

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represent the multinational giant in the countries of the Middle East. You are the first manager in the sector to defend a doctoral dissertation, today you are also a full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, the only manager so far who has managed the subsidiaries of two global companies – Dow AgroSciences and Summit Agro in Bulgaria. These personal achievements of yours give me grounds to ask – have you climbed your Everest?

I am at the foot of my Everest. I am not retreating. I have the energy, drive and desire to continue upwards towards the peak. This is a sign, an indication to the competition that I will be a thorn in its side for many years to come. The behavioural psychology that I profess states that the greatest challenge for me is to be patient and not give up. Not to forget that I am doing what I love. And it is not good to relax. Every day a new idea comes to my mind, but the word dream sounds uncertain to me, so I call it a goal. Everything that happens to you in life is for the better; if you live with this awareness, nothing can shake you. The feeling is very special.

- ***What are the trends, the vision and the prospects of today's market for agrochemicals, fertilizers and seeds in our country?***

All indications are present that the market is developing, the trend and growth have stable parameters. Regardless of the difficulties, caused in most cases by purely local provocations, speculations and irrational actions.

What do I mean? The arable land is increasing, which means more pesticides, seeds and fertilizers. Production technologies are being improved, and the intensity of plant protection, nutrition and genetics is increasing. At the same time, the challenge is great – in a highly dynamic, variable and uncertain climatic and phytosanitary environment, production must increase and be cost-effective and profitable.

- ***Do you support the business thesis that truth is born in competition?***

Of course, I support this assertion unreservedly. And I make maximum efforts for Summit Agro, the company I am currently managing, to be a loyal, honest and open competitor to all leading companies on the Bulgarian market. I dare say that over the last six years we have been doing excellently.

- ***There is a lot of talk, and it is already being done, about new technologies for communication – the digitisation and digitalisation of agriculture. Will this large-scale transformation not depersonalise and marginalise competences, expertise and professional skills?***

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This large-scale transformation will happen. This is the future! But in no way does it mean that the competences and professional skills of farmers and specialists will be crossed out and devalued, but it will make all these people readjust to different speeds. Everything in its own time... The demand for technically trained specialists will never stop, but they will increasingly be required to think outside established frameworks in order to turn problems into opportunities for sustainable growth.

- ***Your attitude towards the smuggling of plant protection products. What is the way for the state to solve this serious problem, to eliminate this corruption relapse, which is the cause of colossal losses both for traders and for agricultural producers?***

The definition of the problem is: illegal import of plant protection products from countries outside the EU. The consequences of this “black” trade are very serious and by no means only financial. They threaten both human health and the purity of the natural environment, for the simple reason that their composition and active bases are of unknown origin. As far as economic losses are concerned, they are multidirectional. On the one hand – legitimate traders lose, and on the other – producers risk compromising both their harvest and the market for their produce; sensitive European standards are violated. The losses for the national budget from the point of view of uncollected direct and indirect taxes are enormous. According to our corporate calculations, 20% of the business with plant protection products in Bulgaria is outside the law. The illegal parallel market of pesticides exists, undisturbed, under the nose of all official state authorities!

In my opinion, the easiest way to curb to a substantial degree this harmful, behind-the-scenes activity is for the responsible institutions to organise and carry out several demonstrative inspections of farmers who use illegally imported pesticide products, destroying their produce and stopping the subsidising of their production. In addition, the mass media are obliged to inform the public objectively and impartially about the purpose of these demonstrative actions. However, for all this to happen, political will and decisive action are necessary!

- ***Do we have in our country an effective toolkit for protecting the interests of producers and traders of pesticides, fertilizers and seeds?***

At present, in our country there is no effective legal mechanism, nor sectoral organisations that protect the interests of the participants in the business. Sufficient proof of my position on this toxic topic is, for example, the fact that many trading companies have huge receivables to collect, but they are left to the whims of fate, far from any legal, trade union or any other protection.

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- ***Summit Agro, the company of which you are now the manager, is striving for market leadership. How would you explain this fact – as a speculation by the competition or a strategic conceptual model, professional capacity for consolidation, or something quite different...***

We do not hide our attitudes and ambitions; we are charged with energy to prove that we are an indispensable factor on the Bulgarian market for pesticides, fertilizers and seeds. Our conceptual project for sustainable business growth is well defined, with a vision for the present and the future. Our commercial portfolio is large and perfectly balanced. Moreover, registrations of many more products are underway, which gives us confidence that we will achieve a new series of market breakthroughs, win new positions and expand our presence. In addition, we are directing efforts and energy into several other innovative agricultural businesses with the firm intention of positioning them on the market in the near future.

- ***On every occasion and everywhere you demonstrate a low threshold of tolerance towards manifestations of disloyalty and a lack of need at any cost to be liked by one or another conjunctural person. What are these reactions: emotion, reactivity, charge or a necessary form, responsibility?***

My manifestations of intolerance towards unfair competition and below-the-belt blows are my personal reaction to every attempt at non-market behaviour. And as for the fact that with my straightforwardness and my attitude to speak without beating about the bush or twisting words, my explanation is that most people always strive to be liked by others instead of liking themselves. That is exactly when troubles are born. Because a person does not know how to act in order to be liked by others. You tear yourself into four, you twist, you bend, you perform all sorts of tricks, you crawl obsequiously and in the end you mess up...

- ***What is the scheme, the price of success of your latest business project? Summit Agro, from a small company experiencing difficulties at the beginning of this decade, has turned into a successful and prosperous structure with a full range of products to cope with the challenges of the market?***

The reason why the “engine” of Summit Agro stalled on the Bulgarian market in 2010-2011 was that key products dropped out of the commercial corporate portfolio due to the fact that many of them were not included in Annex 1, as required by European regulations. The seed business also fell into a crisis situation, as the company failed to conclude contracts with some of its previously priority suppliers.

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The first thing I did after becoming part of Summit Agro was the rapid structuring of a new pesticide portfolio in all segments with the participation of many reputable manufacturers; we introduced innovative fertilisation technologies with the respective original and high-quality products, as well as a modest range of seeds. This move proved decisive for us to return to the market, to generate interest and to attract committed and loyal supporters, a customer audience of reputable agricultural producers.

Another strongly positive market move was the selection of the new team. Today, with my hand on my heart, I openly and loudly declare: I have a great team capable of making things happen, a combination of attitudes, qualities, spirit and high professional competences. The atmosphere and the planned horizon are important. If employees are placed in conditions of strict control and strongly hierarchical structures, in which mistakes are severely punished, they lose motivation and cease to feel emotionally engaged with their tasks.

A manager is dependent on many external circumstances and factors over which he often cannot exert influence. The employees of Summit Agro, thank God, know this well and understand that between them and reality there is not an all-powerful figure, but also a person who, together with them, struggles with the challenges, without running away from his responsibilities, but also not always able to solve all issues here and now. Personally, I am completely satisfied with my choices and proud of my team.

We are talking about a real corporate policy, about a vision, about the future. Today our company has a turnover four times higher compared to what was achieved by 2012. This success index changes the perspective, provides a fast track and generates a new conceptual charge.

- ***What is your attitude towards the institution of the distributor? It is beyond any doubt that in recent years it has significantly devalued, not without the participation of one or another super-powerful multinational company.***

For Summit Agro, the institution of the distributor, or more precisely the partner, is of key importance; for us it works very well. We share the business philosophy that our local partner knows better the habits of consumers and is in close relations with suppliers.

In short: the partners of Summit Agro are part of the company; our policy is aimed at strict implementation of the “iron” rule – we need distributors, we continue to help them survive and to profit with the products of Summit Agro.

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Mr. Tityanov, thank you for honouring the invitation of the magazine "Plant Protection" to give this interview for our readers. Happy anniversary! We wish you health, success and to be loved!

Profile: He was born on 28 May 1968 in Haskovo, and is a graduate of the Russian Language High School in the city. In 1993 he graduated with a Master's degree from the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, majoring in Plant Protection. He developed a doctoral dissertation at the same university and received the academic degree Doctor of Agricultural Sciences in 2006.

He began his career as an agronomist at the Regional Plant Protection Service in Haskovo, then for a year and a half he was a sales representative for Southern Bulgaria of the Greek agrochemical company Eftymiadis.

In April 1996 he was appointed Country Manager for Bulgaria at the representative office of the American multinational company Dow AgroSciences in Sofia. In 2000 the company promoted and positioned him as Commercial Director for Bulgaria and the countries of the Middle East, with headquarters in Athens, Greece.

In 2006-2010 he developed his own business as a representative in Bulgaria of Dow AgroSciences and the Belgian Agriphar. In October 2010 he was appointed full-time Associate Professor at the Agronomy Faculty of the University of Forestry in Sofia. Since May 2012 he has been Executive Director of Summit Agro. In March 2018 he was also appointed full-time Associate Professor at the Faculty of Plant Protection and Agroecology of the Agricultural University in Plovdiv.