



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.
Western Balkans



TEN YEARS OF THE ACADEMY OF LIBERAL POLITICS



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Introductory

At the end of 2010, following a second full season of cooperation with Libek, Miloš Nikolić, Đorđe Trikoš, Petar Čekerevac and Milovan Dekić presented a new, very bold idea – to found the Academy for Liberal Politics (ALP). Although this proposal sounded perhaps too bold at first, I realised that it was no coincidence that I had previously called the four of them musketeers. Determination, courage and originality – coupled with great knowledge and a willingness to evolve and improve – distinguished all four and justified this nickname.

Admittedly, not everyone with whom the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for the Western Balkans was working at the time was happy from the start, both because of our earlier cooperation and even more because of the new horizons that opened up with the establishment of such an academy. At that time, many spoke of liberalism and even claimed it for themselves, but rare were those who wanted a fundamental change in society and thus also in themselves, and who further possessed the personal integrity necessary for its implementation.

Those of us who were older, as much as we liked to remember the last phases of declining socialism in the SFRY through cheerful stories, were at least partly envious that in those “peaceful and happy times” we had not had the opportunity to get to know all its facets besides the one, official world view, especially those in the field of economic and political thinking.

The ALP programme was extensive enough each year to “disturb” open-minded students at the right time – at the end of their official education – with other insights and other world views, and to encourage them to retain their curiosity even after the transition to the routine and confinement of everyday work.

Although only in their twenties, several students of the Academy have already managed to reach those positions in Serbian society where one begins to take responsibility for oneself and one's surroundings. And the true significance of the ALP will only become apparent when a few more decades of its activity have gone by and when the strength and number of responsible and free people also begins to prevail in Serbia.



Dušan Dinić
*Senior Project Manager for Serbia and Croatia
Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom,
Western Balkans*

Foreword

When we started our Academy of Liberal Politics, we wanted to create a programme that we as students had not had the opportunity to attend. We knew people who would also be a part of it. We hoped there would be more and more of them. Every year. We envisioned a meeting place for the greatest liberals in our society. A gathering of experienced professors, researchers, authors, journalists, activists, publicists with intellectually hungry, ambitious and creative students. An oasis of free thinking and inspiring plans for the future.

The first Academy of Liberal Politics (ALP) began in February 2012 and lasted until June of the same year. The biggest structural change that has taken place since then has certainly been the introduction of a two-semester programme starting with the fourth generation of students in 2014. From then until today, ten generations of exceptional students from all over Serbia have passed through our academy.

The ALP very quickly became much more than the usual education and research programme. As we adapted and improved the structure, thematic units and programme, we ourselves sought what we thought was a desirable balance: a harmony between offering the highest quality theoretical knowledge, strengthening students' analytical and research capacities, focusing on broader intellectual areas of arts and culture on the one hand, and on the other providing contacts, mentoring, academic and professional guidance and entry into the world of business opportunities and education.

The tenth jubilee of the Academy of Liberal Politics was shaped by the unexpected circumstances of the Corona virus pandemic, with the entire programme conducted online. The speed and ease with which the students adapted to this way of working, while maintaining a high level of commitment, dedication and focus, is certainly something that has marked this challenging time for us.

Despite these challenges, this year, as every year, we are carefully monitoring the reactions and comments of the participants. We analyse their responses in evaluations and questionnaires and refine the programme accordingly, maintaining the core that has proven to be successful, useful and pervasive. Some participants like the main programme's lectures and engaging discussions best. Others prefer individual, thematic courses where they gain more practical knowledge and skills. We strive to get to know everyone's inclinations, ambitions and abilities as clearly as possible. With each passing of the previous generation of great young people and the arrival of the new, we ourselves learn something about the processes and phenomena that are changing rapidly around us.

We often emphasise to the participants the great importance of the Libek community: a community that brings together alumni, lecturers, mentors, partners and profession-

al colleagues; a community that continues to support many in further academic development even after the Academy programme, such as business training, employment and career advancement.

There is an inscription on the wall in our hallway – Free and Responsible. Since our beginnings, Libek as an organisation has truly believed that free and responsible individuals are the foundation of a healthy, open and prosperous society in Serbia. The Academy of Liberal Politics, which has ten generations behind it, can certainly be proud of the students who have passed through its hallways.



Miloš Nikolić,
president of Libek

The programme of the Academy of Liberal Politics

Katarina Brajković - Libek, *Communication Manager*

With ten generations of outstanding students, the Academy of Liberal Politics is Libek's most important and well-known educational programme for exceptional students at all levels.

Launched in 2012, the Academy has today become the leading non-academic educational programme in the region in the study of the political philosophy of freedom, economics, the principles of market economics and other relevant social issues.

Over these ten years, more than 200 outstanding students have participated in the Academy, some of whom are now among the most successful young professionals in their field.

Crucial in organising a programme is maintaining a stimulating balance between theoretical concepts, practical skills, and current academic and social debates. For this reason, over 60 well-known experts of various profiles have taught at the Academy so far – distinguished domestic and foreign professors, researchers, social activists, entrepreneurs, managers and journalists, etc.

The most important facet of the Academy of Liberal Politics is the main programme, where we explore the most important social debates with our students and analyse some of the most current global and local challenges.

In addition to the main programme, there is also a research programme where Academy participants, under the guidance of Libek's researchers, conduct public opinion surveys on relevant social issues and write proposals for public policy reform.

In addition, as part of the creative programme for students, we organise readings, screenings of thematic feature films and documentaries, and discussions on topics such as dystopia, bioethics, global risks, security and privacy.

As part of the practical Public Speaking and Presentation Techniques course, participants practise the effective formulation and confident expression of their ideas in various professional and personal situations to stimulate and move them to think and act.

In a practical course in business journalism, participants are trained to write and present complex analytical content, learning from the experience of numerous editors and journalists from print and electronic media.

The Constitution of Freedom course discusses the political philosophy of liberalism and all relevant critical approaches dealing with social, economic and political issues, while the Contemporary Populism course, Pop Folk, introduces the main ideas, social movements, political parties and populist leaders from Europe and America.

The Academy of Liberal Politics offers students the opportunity to further their education through individual work with a mentor from different areas of economic, public and media life according to personal and professional preferences. We ensure suitable mentoring for our students by expanding the pool of mentors every year.

The programme is divided into two semesters, and in June 2021 the tenth generation of students will successfully graduate from the Academy of Liberal Politics.



The importance of economic education

Slaviša Tasić, *Economist*

Belgrade has a significant, almost thirty-year tradition of alternative education. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the university landscape was much less open than it is today, alternative education institutions such as the Belgrade Open School and the Alternative Academic Education Network had an immeasurable importance for the education of a whole generation of young people. At a time when academia and society were largely closed off, and before the internet offered more meaningful content or was even available, alternative education institutions were the only way for many of us to encounter new ideas and learn different things.

Libek's Academy of Liberal Politics operates under different conditions today, but the mission of alternative education remains the same. The formal academy, academic study and formal research are important; this does not need to be specifically demonstrated. However, any intellectual environment that wants to grow and flourish must also support various forms of non-academic education.

In the past, many new ideas have come from outside the narrow and rigid circles of academia. Whether new theories (such as those of Einstein, who was working at the patent office when he wrote his most important papers), the practical experiences of innovators (from the steam engine to the mobile phone), impressive works by Mises and Rothbard, or less impressive ones by Marx and Engels – the fact is that a disproportionate number of ideological, theoretical and practical innovators lived outside academia's ivory towers.

There is a reason for this. The university forces one into a certain pattern. You have to adhere to a certain form. One has no room for manoeuvre. As a lecturer, you have to cover the standard material for the subject. You have to present both sides of the debate. You can have your own ideas and think out loud, but it is not one's job. One's job is to present the scientific consensus to the students, and there is not much space left for one's own opinions – nor those of the students.

That is not the case with alternative forms of education. When you lecture at the Academy of Liberal Politics, you are there to go beyond the standard framework. You know that the students at the academy have already covered what needs to be covered in their regular education, and they are looking to you for something different. You are not here to retell the familiar, but to open new windows.

This is important for the students, but it also concerns the lecturers. The students who are there have already chosen themselves by applying to the academy. They are there because they are interested, because they want to deepen things and push the boundaries. Communication with them goes both ways, and the lecturer quickly finds himself in unfamiliar terrain.

The Academy of Liberal Politics has an essential economic component, covering everything from basic economic principles to a re-examination of current affairs. It is, after all, impossible to learn about classical liberalism without paying particular attention to the economic ideas that are inextricably linked to it.

Moreover, economic education is special because it is classically liberal in nature. It is unique in that it is largely aimed at correcting anti-liberal prejudices and intuitions. Few come to physics class with the prejudice that there is no gravity. Biology students do not usually come to faculty with a particularly strong opinion about photosynthesis. In economics, on the other hand, the initial intuition is against freedom and the market and biased towards the state. It would be easy for students to come to their first economics lecture with no knowledge at all. Instead, they are confronted with the prejudice that private property only benefits the rich and trade destroys the economy.

Economic education can be about the definition of the balance of payments and calculating interest rates, but that can also be read on Wikipedia. Its success is ultimately reflected in the extent to which it has succeeded in breaking down anti-liberal prejudices and communicating Adam Smith's most important thesis - that the common good is best directed by the free initiative of the people rather than by the heavy-handed state. This is Smith's counterintuitive thesis of the invisible hand, and it is at the core of both economics and liberalism. When law and order prevail, private property and personal economic interests lead to a general well-being in which everyone participates.

To this day, Smith's proposal is little understood. In some places more, in some places less, but certainly not enough in Serbia after socialism and a few more decades of inherited education. The Academy of Liberal Politics has done a great deal in the last decade to spread liberal ideas and to expound the arguments for a politically and economically free society. But there is still much to do.



Slaviša Tasić
Economist

The link between politics and economics

Danica Popović, *Professor of the Faculty of Economics*

Higher education never ends with graduation; rather, it seems to start then. Libek seized this great opportunity to properly educate already trained lawyers, economists, sociologists, political scientists and other young intellectuals and founded the Academy of Liberal Politics in cooperation with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

Lectures in economics were of particular importance because they touch all aspects of our lives; many economic laws are not covered in the corpus of public knowledge.

The first major regularity relates to the principle of general equilibrium, which states that the decision of a government or the action of a large corporation always triggers a mechanism that unbalances all parties, while the final position of all parties is only partly the result of their own actions: it is necessary to rebalance all forces. This principle is constantly at work and leads to much doubt and dissatisfaction with economic policies among non-economists. An increase in the minimum wage, for example, seems to most non-economists to be a very good and noble measure by the government, but the principle of general equilibrium states that such a measure will first lead to an increase in unemployment and thus to a lowering of the standard of living of (former) employees.

Another important cause of the misunderstanding of economic regularities is the negative feedback mechanism that occurs with any government measure. For example, if the state increases investment, it will appear to everyone that it is doing the right thing. However, because of the additional money in the economy and the risk of inflation, the central bank will be forced to raise interest rates. Private investors will consequently be significantly affected by this decision of the state: operating costs will increase and thus future profits will decrease. This and similar actions by the state are referred to as “crowding out” in economics, and are about crowding out the private sector at the expense of increasing state investment.

Very many economic concepts, presentations and interpretations are challenged even by lay people, so this course is very valuable for lawyers, sociologists, political scientists and many other professionals. High growth rates, for example, which only occur in the short term, are not very important for economics. The interpretation of numerous statistical data can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, so this additional knowledge is certainly of great benefit to students.

Such economic topics are not dealt with through facts and enumerations: the aim was to review ideas, concepts, experiences and strategies, giving each participant the chance to



Danica Popović
Professor of the Faculty of Economics

find the best solution and then discuss it with colleagues or with their mentor in the mentoring programme.

The multidisciplinary nature of the participants lent great value to these Academy of Liberal Politics classes, which of course presented the lecturer with the challenge of opening up many controversial issues that inevitably arise in the analysis of events we attend and participate in.

The particular richness of the Academy of Liberal Politics' programmes stems from the fact that the best students enrol in the Academy. In ten years, over 200 of the best academics at the University of Belgrade have sat on the Academy's benches, and have been offered various programmes and lecturers in two-semester courses – professors, experts, journalists, philosophers – thus providing them with a wealth of academic and technical knowledge which they could not study in their home faculties. Of particular value were the practical courses in business journalism, where students simultaneously learned complex business topics and how to present them in the media.

From the tests that the students took, as well as from discussions and subsequent performances, it is clear that a very large percentage of the students have embraced the knowledge offered and are ready to apply it to the best of their ability.

The importance of the Public Speaking and Presentation Skills Course

Interview with Relja Dereta, Course coordinator

Why is it necessary for young people to learn public speaking techniques and presentation skills?

When we perform, we do something quite brave – we put ourselves, our thoughts and ideas in front of the audience, we face their evaluation, their prejudices, maybe even their condemnation, we don't know if we will succeed or not ... but no matter how a certain performance goes, what is valuable is that it has taken place.

Young people come into contact with public speaking through often traumatic examinations in front of the black board in primary and secondary school, and then through seminar papers and final exams in faculty, after which years may pass before they find themselves in a situation where they have to speak publicly. Therefore, they should “plunge” into situations where they practise expressing themselves as often as possible.

What is your brief advice for good public speaking?

There are many good exercises and tips on the internet and in books on how to work on your performance, but it's all for nothing if you don't practise. It goes without saying that everyone needs, for example, to exercise regularly to be in shape physically, but when it comes to public performance and the

skills that come with it there is an illusion that reading advice is enough to implement it – no, you have to practise!



Relja Dereta

Course coordinator and communication skills trainer

Don't just keep your thoughts in your head – practise out loud, take a picture, analyse the picture of yourself, recognise what is good and what could have been better. Give yourself suggestions for the next practise session (pause while speaking, finish sentences, use your hands more, try to say the essentials in half the time ...) and – repeat it many times!

How do good presentation skills affect professional success?

To advance professionally, we need to develop not only ourselves, but also the form in which we express ourselves. We cannot wait for someone on the outside to show us what we have to offer. The wonderful thing about working on our communication skills is that by practising this form we often discover how we need to develop ourselves.



The importance of learning research techniques

Nikola Jović, *Course coordinator*

What is the importance of public opinion research?

Public opinion research should be understood first and foremost as a means of addressing the asymmetry of information in the relationship between political actors and citizens. Despite all the cognitive limitations, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques offers the most reliable insight into what political actors are most interested in, and that is the answer to the question what citizens think / feel about ... (party X, candidate Y, the legalisation of marijuana, Serbia's accession to the EU)? Public opinion polls thus help at various stages of the political process, from policy making to formulating strategic communication to implementation and decision-making. Of course, it is important to say that the success of a given policy platform does not depend on having "raw" data, but on the creative-analytical transformation of it into applied policy insights.

To what extent are the techniques learnt in the Public Opinion Research Techniques Course applicable in other fields?

Public opinion polls are important for all those whose "work" depends on understanding the preferences and attitudes of individuals/citizens. In this sense, a basic set of methodological knowledge is applicable in academic, political and economic research. Psychologists, sociologists, political scientists and other "humanities scholars" formulate, test and confirm or reject their scientific assumptions by empirical validation through research. The business world is probably the biggest user of research, as it is applied to product testing, service evaluation, strategic communication and many other purposes that involve determining the preferences of existing/potential users.

How important is it to know these techniques in Serbia? Where are mistakes made in practice? What needs to be improved?

One of the main problems of our educational culture is that it encourages students to obey and agree rather than to critically question and challenge. These two virtues, adopted as a concept for understanding society and the relationships in it, are very important for the research profession. To study society and its principles properly, one must be open and willing to question social patterns and one's own role in them. Also, the way mathematics is taught to "humanities" students in the education system leads to the creation of aversion and fears and consequently a high level of innumeracy. This part of the problem is particularly important when considering quantitative research.



Nikola Jović

Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Political Science



In terms of polling institutes and their political research sectors, it is most important to improve their professionalism and independence in relation to the political actors who commission their research. Many agencies seem to conduct research in a way that is more suitable for PR campaigns than for independent and neutral research.

The education of a free person

Goran S. Milovanović, *Lecturer in the programme*

Why do we need a curriculum that stands outside the framework and boundaries of the academic community (and yet is connected to it and respects its standards), as our Academy of Liberal Politics (ALP) has, whose tenth anniversary we have been invited to celebrate? The past ten years of the ALP have been marked by theoretical issues in the humanities (even the natural sciences, through Dr Milan M. Čirković's lectures on the philosophy of risk), the teaching of direct skills (especially in research procedures and public speaking skills), mini-data analysis courses, but also talks about the art of film and literature. Who would be motivated to complicate their – let's be honest, today quite schematic – path to an academic title by investing a lot of time and effort to complete such a curriculum, and why? And yet, so many have been motivated to join us in working in the ALP in recent years.

I will start from personal experience, not forgetting that personal experience is everything: because there is a big difference between "**knowing something**" or "**knowing about something**", and "**knowing how to do something**" – and only direct experience leads a person to the latter, and in my opinion ultimate, forms of knowledge. If it seems that "knowing how to do something" is only applicable to skills – then you are very wrong, and this is confirmed by everyone who has hired and introduced young colleagues with the best and second best grades in their studies from several years of university education into the workplace. There is not a single person who has had this experience who has not shared a well-known truth with me: even with the best university degree

and with the highest honours earned, at least the first six months to a year of work experience is unprofitable for both the entrepreneur and his employee. **Learning is still taking place**: imparting knowledge from textbooks and accompanying literature, with usually very little practice as can be offered by academic programmes (especially in the humanities), is a long and arduous process. All too often, this process leads graduates and postgraduates to ask themselves what and why they studied diligently in these few years at the faculties. Too often we see that those who choose academic vocations remain entrenched with their knowledge in the world of scientific periodicals and the discourse of academic conferences, which the market views with an almost disinterested eye, if at all, while their colleagues entering the market, with years of experience, seem to forget the basics that the academy was supposed to teach. These words are not a criticism of one (university) or the other (market): it is simply in the nature of things that the distance between the real world and life, whose needs must be met, on the one hand, and its formalisation in academic programmes, on the other, is enormous.

Based on my experience and academic career as a scientist in basic research and teaching and later as an entrepreneur in the field of applied sciences and training for such an application, I would like to present things using the following dichotomy. I see two basic types of motivation that seem to me to be predominant in a young person: one is to **understand** the world and the other is to **change** the world. We will, of course, hear various cynical remarks about both, but





in a person in whom we find neither, in their place we are sure to find only boredom. Both are well known to me, and if I wanted to say something about our ALP through them, I would say that ***it is first and foremost a curriculum for those who are motivated to change the world.*** That, it seems to me, is the best way to see the function of such a curriculum, and explains the constant interest in participating in the ALP over the ten years since its inception. It should make us happy to know that there are young people in our country who want to step out of the narrow academic framework of their studies into a field where there is dialogue with both experts in basic disciplines and experts with experience in direct social and public life: in research and analysis, policy making, journalism, decision making, communication with the public, and attempts to predict the course of social and political life.

But if the ALP was to attempt to satisfy such a need, the need to bridge the gap between the knower and the doer, to go from one who understands the world to one who eventually changes the world, then it is clear that its content and methodology had to be significantly different from what the standard curricula of higher education require. And what is perhaps the best thing about our ALP is the fact that it was aware of this from the very beginning of its work and with the first generations that participated in it. Inviting law and political science students, to take just one example, to discuss the potential impact of biotechnology through a popular science fiction film is a move characteristic of our method. Showing students of economics and psychology that their sciences relate to human behaviour in almost identical ways, without requiring them to understand anything more complex than high school mathematics when discussing the problem of rational choice, is also a step characteristic of our method. Asking programme participants to think in terms of counterfactuals when discussing the problem of global catastrophic risk – that is, to discuss ***possible*** courses of events that we now know had only one outcome known to us – and to draw conclusions about how we should think and prepare ***today*** for what may happen to us ***tomorrow***, bypassing the probably intractable problem of prediction, is a step characteristic of our method. Those who have worked over the years to create and improve the ALP programme

have, I would say, always had this very thing in mind, namely how to channel the opinions and knowledge of these great young people they have met in the Libek auditorium towards a transition from concepts and words to plans and activities.

The most difficult thing is to educate a free person; I have seen (to my greatest satisfaction) many who have given up. So at the ALP we didn't try to ***impart*** knowledge, but we tried, starting from knowledge, to invite debate, questioning, criticism. It was not only one lecturer at the ALP that had to be able to bear opposition and disagreement with what he said; all those who came out of the lecture more satisfied than when they had entered the lecture hall to teach are in fact those who are the essence of this school. Those who cannot be refuted in the office or the lecture hall are, of course, the first to be refuted by life itself, when they are sent out of the office or the lecture hall into the companies or the streets (it is enough to send them to the market) to learn the reality of the social process of value creation. We have never allowed ourselves the presumption of making the educational process in the ALP a one-way street. Apart from the fact that this risks creating a kind of social fossil lulled into a safe, uncritical knowledge – like those decades of socialist Yugoslavia which have caused our fellow citizens so many serious consequences – but also that it is distasteful in the truest sense of the word to educate a free human being by trying to instil an eternal truth into his head. The education of those who are to change something is, I am convinced, by nature quite different. We have been striving to discover this nature at the ALP for the past ten years; ten generations of students are now here, and it is most fitting to hear from them how successful we have been in this endeavour.



Goran S. Milovanović

Psychologist and data scientist

The importance of studying populism

Ilija Vojnović, *Lecturer in the programme*

This year's Bled Strategic Forum. A panel discussion for leaders. The moderator's first question – "What is politics for you?" The awkward answers of EU officials revolve around the idea of "selfless giving and serving people while respecting the rights and power of institutions". This bureaucratic symphony on the verge of false notes was interrupted by the tanned Hungarian head of government Viktor Orbán with the remark that politics "is the preparation of the nation for the future". There is no reference to principles, democratic architecture, respect for different interests, and, above all, there are no institutions. Politics is me, the nation and a challenging future into which, despite everything, I am safely leading it with a tanned brow.

The Bled miniature aptly depicted the global populist wave as a reaction to the alienation of bureaucratic elites and an inadequate institutional response to increasing challenges and what is now commonly referred to as the "crisis of democracy".

Populism and its often costly consequences are not new in politics. When Suleyman Demirel, in his election campaign in the early 1990s, then as an oppositionist, told tobacco producers in Turkey that he was "offering 5,000 liras more than

the highest offer other parties would make them, however high it might be", he probably did not think much about the fact that as a future prime minister he would actually have to settle this bill, which he had made without the landlord, not only with budget funds, but also by burning tons of tobacco that had been grown unnecessarily due to the enormous subsidies.

However, the modern populist wave has produced a number of authoritarian demagogues at such speed that the attempt to distinguish political parties and movements into "populist" and "non-populist" is slowly becoming meaningless and is being replaced by a more appropriate classification into more or less populist actors.

Several factors have influenced the exponential growth of populist groups and policies. First of all, the enormous technological changes triggered by globalisation and mass migration have led to an increase in economic insecurity and a real fear of the future among a large number of people in the countries most affected by this turmoil. Also, the drastic change in the nature of media and the impact of new digital platforms and smart technologies have necessitated more efficient, faster and more incendiary communication. As a



result, more and more political decisions are being subordinated to new communication strategies, which is a complete departure from the traditional political environment in democratic systems where communication is shaped on the basis of the politics of ideas and put at its service. Donald Trump, one of the most impressive representatives of the populist circle, managed to build his mandate on short, direct tweets that became a strategic backbone of his administration soon after he took office in the White House and a factor that united the large support he had.

Ideologically, the populism of the left and the right cannot differ in essence, but only in the aesthetic sense. While left-wing populism aims to establish "social justice" and fight for the "little man" through fair redistribution, the right primarily fights for the promotion of a "true, unadulterated national being". The essence of both versions, however, is that both populisms are precisely directed at certain elites who, due to different interests, do not allow the realisation of a "just, egalitarian society" or the construction of an "original, national purity". Whether in opposition or in power, modern populists, led by strong and enterprising authoritarians, present themselves as anti-elite and anti-system movements. In their campaign, nothing stands in the way of the "will of the people" and "justice", not even democratic rules, procedures or institutions. Therefore, populist movements are anti-democratic at their core and inevitably lead to authoritarianism and even tyranny.

The study of contemporary populism and its various forms is an extremely important step towards understanding and eventually reversing this dangerous trend. The Libek Academy of Liberal Politics and especially the "Pop Folk" course have for years been providing students with not only a solid theoretical foundation, but also practical experiences and case studies on various examples and forms of contemporary populism. This valuable knowledge is a prerequisite for transforming the perception of populism as a temporary political tactic into its understanding as a dominant socio-political pattern that fundamentally changes the relations between the individual and the state and society.

The Athenians understood from the beginning that democracy also contains at its core the potential seed of its own destruction – freedom of choice. The answer to this perfect imperfection was and is to build and improve value systems, principles, procedures and institutions. The guarantee of freedom is undeniable, but the new and coming challenges of the global crisis of democracy require constant reflection, adaption and, above all, the will to learn.



Ilija Vojnović

International Republican Institute (IRI)

The importance of mentoring at the Academy

Interview with Nataša Filipović, *Director of Ovation BBDO*

Why do you think mentoring at the Academy is particularly important for our students?

For me, mentoring at the Academy has always been a special experience because I meet bright and ambitious young people. For those who participate, mentoring is an opportunity to learn about and discover all aspects of the phenomenon or reality they are interested in, in informal and direct contact with experienced market experts and intellectuals. When these two worlds meet, there are exchanges and interactions that are beneficial and very often create a deep network of contacts between people in the field. For people who have the ambition to make a difference in society and in the space we inhabit, mentoring is indeed a way or a means to connect intergenerational spaces and make them understandable and communicative.

What are your positive experiences as a mentor in the programme?

My experience has been extremely valuable – I have had the opportunity to meet exceptional young people, spend time in conversations and consultation. Learning from each other and helping each other when needed. I have learnt a lot from my “mentees”, I have got to know the coming generations, their characteristics, the problems they face, the dilemmas they have and the world view that surrounds us. The most positive result is that today I do not hesitate to ask them for help or an opinion when I need it. I hope that it will be the same for them.

What is the culture of mentoring in Serbia? What should be improved above all?

We learn many things along the way because we have quite a big discontinuity in practice and theory in these areas in academic and pedagogical programmes. The culture of mentoring means that mentors also work on themselves, on the relationship and on expectations. This is particularly important because the aim of mentoring should not be indoctrination, but to develop talent and raise its profile, and to support the development of skills. If we succeed in promoting the professional development of ALP members, we succeed as mentors.



Alumni survey and alumni statements

Katarina Brajković - Libek, *Communication Manager*

In September 2020, we conducted a survey to find out how and to what extent participation in the Academy of Liberal Politics has influenced the development path of our alumni.

The survey included the first eight generations of participants and we received responses from 63 participants (47%).

Over 90% of the respondents indicated that the Academy had helped them to better understand political, economic and social events and become more active as citizens.

In terms of career development, 89.58% of alumni respondents believe that this programme has helped them become better students, while 57.45% of participants said that this programme has helped them find an internship.

Most of the participants surveyed are currently working in the private sector, while members of the second largest group are still students.

In the survey itself, we asked the alumni to rate Libek's communication with them and to give us suggestions so that we can improve it. Participants most frequently pointed out the need for more formal alumni events such as panel discussions, debates and lectures for alumni. Participants also stated that it would be good to include more alumni as new lecturers at the Academy, but that meetings of older alumni with new generations should also be organised.

What we would point out as a special value of the programme is that it is known to employers in various fields in Serbia, so they regularly ask us to recommend young professionals from our alumni base.

Some of our most successful alumni shared their experiences at the Academy of Liberal Politics:

The Academy of Liberal Politics is one of the most important choices I have made when it comes to attending non-formal education programmes. The Academy gave me the opportunity to discuss philosophical concepts but also very practical phenomena, and such discussions helped me to better understand my professional goals during my studies and to feel encouraged to pursue them. – **Anica Petrović, winner of the Fulbright Scholarship for Studies in the USA**



Anica Petrović

The Academy of Liberal Politics was crucial for my social engagement and professional development. It was an environment that further stimulated my curiosity and helped me define my interests. Being surrounded by people who are committed to changing themselves and the world around them inspired me to get involved in a campaign to provide access to medication for multiple sclerosis in Serbia. At the same time, it was important to me in awakening my intellectual curiosity at work in a marketing agency. In the end, the Academy with all its qualities definitely influenced my biggest success so far: receiving a Chevening Scholarship from the British Government and an offer to study at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

– **Aleksandar Ninkov, LSE student**



Aleksandar Ninkov

The Academy of Liberal Politics is a perfect introduction to engaging with the social world. The ALP influenced my interests so much that I realised during the programme that I wanted to continue studying politics and enrol in the Faculty of Political Science. The ALP was a perfect stepping stone, and six years later I am still engaging with issues from these fields.

– Đorđe Mančev, President and co-founder of The Berlin Center for Individualist Thought



Đorđe Mančev

