Interview: Milica Glisic – Country Manager West Balkan Region, Wörwag Pharma



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Milica Glisic, with over 15 years of experience in the pharma business and ten years at Wörwag Pharma, discusses the strong workforce in the Balkans, Wörwag Pharma's mission in the West Balkan region, and the company's dedication to providing unique and efficient solutions for diabetes and concomitant complications.

Could you talk us through the origins of Wörwag Pharma in Serbia?

Wörwag Pharma has been present in the Serbia since 2006 and in rest of the West Balkan countries from 2007. I have had the opportunity and pleasure to participate in developing Wörwag Pharma West Balkan Region from its beginning. Wörwag Pharma West Balkan Region raised from initially four people collectives to the organization with 17 people in total.

I have started my professional carrier as a medical doctor but I have decided to build my professional life in pharma industry. Before Wörwag Pharma I have worked for in pharmaceutical company also closely linked to the treatment of diabetes. Decision to join Wörwag Pharma Serbia was strongly influenced by my resolution to join new and still developing company on the market, to fully sense all aspects of developing business. Now looking back I can say that it was quite a challenge, but also very exciting to build up company image together with product and disease awareness in that time. During the past years we have gone a long way and build up a strong affiliate of Wörwag Pharma on our market with a lot of success stories to be told, and I strongly

believe that nobody but Wörwag Pharma could provide such unique access to the market niche with its products and an excellent working environment. These two attributes can be considered as our major strengths.

How did your career develop at Wörwag?

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I am very proud that I have transit, during my professional career, all levels of organizational structure in pharma company – from basic to finally leading position. My career started on medical representative job position, and very fast raised from this position a Team lead for field force of West Balkan Region. After successful years in this position I have been offered position of Sales and Marketing manager for the West Balkan Region which I have held for almost 2.5 years. I have enjoyed working on a position of Sales and Marketing as its offers unity of, most often, very different views of market. This unity is very interesting, as it permits another level of understanding of dependence and mutual connection between sales and marketing. In most companies, sales and marketing are separate and therefore can pull each other in contrasting directions. At Wörwag Pharma it was advantageous that the two arms of the sales division work in sync, together as they have substantial influence over one another.

In 2012, I was offered the role of Country manager for the West Balkan region. As such, I have been instrumental in writing the Wörwag Pharma West Balkan story. During this journey, I have come to better understand that Wörwag Pharma and its major resource which company is strongly supporting – professional personal. The flexible and dynamic environment at Wörwag Pharma empowered me to progress. As West Balkan manager, with situated core of the business in Serbia, I have the opportunity to further develop business opportunities of Wörwag Pharma in to the West Balkan Region countries – Bosnia& Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia.

What did you learn during this professional process?

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I have picked up lots of information while building Wörwag in Serbia. I am most proud of the fact that I have taken part in a variety of job positions across the Wörwag Pharma work sphere. I have thrived in each role and consider my evolution within the company to be my real strength. Having personally explored each position, I completely understand all aspects and requirements of different position in our organigram, and in this way I can easily manage every one of them with full compliance of my team. As a result, I am an empathetic and thoughtful manager as I can fully

identify myself with their challenges. I believe that this level of professional development should be made available to everybody.

What are the characteristics that define the markets that you manage?

Serbia is the core country of this region, as a result of its position, majority of changes set up on to its market is reflected to the neighboring markets of Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro. We are significantly co-dependent region, but I do not think that this will be the statement that majority will recognize or admit. For me, when working in this region, it is important to be clear in one's convictions. If you have a strong gut feeling about a process, then act on it, as you are often highly rewarded for your conviction.

For the past two years, the market had positive trend and it is stabilizing, especially if we compare to trend we have in the market in 2012 – previous period. Interestingly, we are now facing a period of stability also visible in the rules and legislation which can dictate the market's actions. Consequently, the pharma market retains a more consistent market value and shows growth.

The two associations: INOVIA (association for the manufacturers of innovative drugs) and GENEZIS (Association of Generic Drugs Manufacturers and Marketing Authorization Holders) have been very helpful in representing pharmaceutical companies vision of the market's potential to the local authorities. It gives me great pleasure that Wörwag Pharma has been a part of GENEZIS association. We manage that our voice can be heard in market through work and joined forces with other pharma companies via Genesis.

How is the affiliate program performing in diabetes?

Wörwag Pharma positions itself in the niche of diabetes and the concomitant diabetes complications. Our goal is, of course, to be the market leader in this niche, as we are offering unique therapeutic solutions for treatment of diabetes' complications. We are specialists in therapeutically area where we work, and we'd like, in the future, to remain leaders in pathogenetic treatment of diabetes polyneuropathy and neurological pain.

Would you explain the current diabetes problem?

Unfortunately, the number of diabetics is rising. There are currently over 600,000 people have been diagnosed with this illness in Serbia, but we believe there to be around half a million people living with undiagnosed diabetes. To remedy this dire situation, we would like to spread the word surrounding the risks of the illness and raise awareness of its treatment, to prevent the final complications of the illness because they can be life-changing. In some cases where the disease is

well-developed, amputation of limbs is a necessary as last resort. We provide therapeutically solutions for late complication of diabetes and nerve regeneration while focusing on preventative measures also. Personally, I feel that we are obliged to aid the healthcare professionals that treated and help diabetes patients.

What more can be done to raise awareness of diabetes?

Thanks to media attention, I believe that the population is well-informed about diabetes. However, I think that when it comes to treatment of the illness, modern life and the times we live in, sometimes takeover. If we consider the stresses and the minimal free time available to normal people, we need to find appropriate solutions. The answer lies in the screening of patients. We need something accessible and practical that can deal with a large volume of people quickly. More screening and more convenient screening has had some successes in the past and is the most appropriate solution.

For Wörwag Pharma, promotion and increasing brand awareness have increased market access. What strategies do you follow to gain market access?

Firstly, Wörwag Pharma is a specialist, offering unique solutions to market issues it addresses. We offer full and accurate information to healthcare professionals and we are trying to support them in this way to decide about best possible therapeutic solutions in treating this disease. We have gained trust in this pursuit and are now considered valid consultant by many healthcare professionals. We are transparent in our approach, trustworthy and given my medical background as a doctor, I am fully aware of importance of valid information regarding therapy and its outcomes.

How do you go about putting the best team for Wörwag?

The current team at Wörwag has spent many years working together and has a great working relationship. We are one of the rare companies in which mutual trust and personal relationships are highly-valued in our workplace. High social intelligence is highly desirable when recruiting, so that staff can build good personal relationships, to be able to connect with their counterparts and engage with the Wörwag Pharma message.

The pharma market has a reputation for high staff turnover. How do you manage to retain the team you have in place?

Firstly, the atmosphere is extremely positive, and each team member has personal links to one another.

To better understand our fantastic company culture, 18 months ago, we conducted an internal survey of our personnel to pinpoint the source of our high level of job satisfaction. We scored a massive 4.6 out of 5 – a very high figure – and discovered that satisfaction came from the *social* side of working in this kind of environment. Interpersonal relationships and job security scored highly, for which we are very proud. Despite the market fluctuations and job insecurity that is rife, the team knows that I will always support them and that I am someone in whom they can place their trust.

What are your goals for Wörwag affiliates in the Western Balkans?

The Balkan region has incredible growth potential, especially Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Montenegro is very important to our operations, although it is more limited given its smaller market size. Serbia has been the growth engine, energizing its neighboring countries. For the past few years, our growth has been above the market potential. The goal for the next five years is to further build upon this growth using Serbia as the heart of operations.

What would your advice be to a general manager looking to invest in Serbia?

The personal touch is of huge importance when working in a country such as Serbia. Culturally, the mentality here in Serbia is people-oriented: it is good to look at your interlocutor in the eyes and create good interpersonal relationships. The legislation and entrance into the market are important and sometimes overwhelming, but this is a country where everything is possible with the right mindset and the right team. But do ensure that you take care in choosing the very best personnel.

Where do you see yourself and Wörwag Pharma in five years?

Wörwag Pharma is a family owned company which prioritizes flexibility and reactivity to market changes. I am satisfied and proud that I am part of this kind of working environment. My current role gives me great satisfaction and am aware of the new challenges that will present themselves as we grow further into the Balkan region. Serbia and its neighbors are an emerging market with stable growth, fair legislation and strong market value alike. Serbia would be a fantastic place to start out in order to spread to the West Balkan region. It would be prudent to start here before looking at other countries nearby, and to further cement our position as leaders in the field of diabetes.

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