

# It pays to put society first

*Whatever the circumstances, whether global pandemic or business as usual, customer service is king. Only those institutions ready to prioritise their customers, as well as support the wider business ecosystem, will thrive*



INTERVIEW WITH  
**Petia Dimitrova**  
CEO & CHAIRPERSON OF THE  
MANAGEMENT BOARD, POSTBANK

Turning 30 feels, to many, like the start of something new. It is a moment to embrace a more mature outlook, to consider the past while looking to the future. This holds true for institutions, just as it does for individuals – or at least that’s the case for Bulgarian institution Postbank, this year celebrating three decades since it was founded as the Balkan nation’s postal savings bank. It’s been a tumultuous 18 months, but Postbank has navigated the challenges of the pandemic thanks to its flexibility, commitment to personalised service and willingness to learn. Drawing on its 30 years in the international banking space, the



institution is now looking to the next 30. *World Finance* spoke to Petia Dimitrova, CEO and chairperson of the bank’s management board, about embracing digitalisation and supporting Bulgarian entrepreneurship going forwards.

**In 2021, Postbank celebrated its 30th anniversary. How would you describe the past year?**

In 30 years, Postbank has proven itself as one of the most successful banks in Bulgaria, an excellent partner, employer and socially responsible company. We have solidified our position as an institution that customers trust, having spent the last three decades opening up a universe of new opportunities to them. Thanks to this shared trust we are third in terms of loan portfolio and the fourth largest bank in Bulgaria in terms of assets and deposits, with a market share of over 10 percent. We boast more than 200 branches nationwide

and, over the last five years, we have received over 100 awards for our digital innovations and products, as well as for our services and social responsibility policy.

The pandemic once again shows us that whatever plans we may make for the future we can never foresee what will happen in reality. Life does not stop – customers need immediate solutions, not ones that take weeks or months. Preparation is essential – we’ve learned that we need to have tailored solutions at the ready so that customers feel they are benefiting from a personal approach.

There is no doubt that now, a year and a half later, trust in the Bulgarian banking system is greater than ever before. All the indications point to the fact that, despite the difficulties we face together, the banking system is and will be an important factor in the post-crisis recovery period. Recent months have shown us that change is possible – in terms of how and

where we work, shop, communicate and rest. I hope we can continue to learn lessons from the many examples of positive change we have seen since the pandemic began.

**The COVID-19 crisis stimulated digitalisation. What special products and services have you offered your customers during this period?**

Excellent customer experience remains a priority. Consumers expect and require us to support their plans even faster and via the most convenient channel – the digital one.

Following the increased active use of digital channels by the bank’s customers, the total share of transactions carried out online on an annual basis reached 78 percent at the end of 2020 versus 22 percent carried out in a branch. The growing trend in developing the bank’s digital channels is also confirmed by annual usage data, with the m-Postbank mobile app

seeing the most significant increase in use. Over the last year, the number of active users of the app grew by 60 percent and the total number of transactions carried out increased by 50 percent compared to 2019.

**What trends do you observe in terms of customer requests?**

Our clients want a personal approach – they want to have access to their money at any time and in any place, to receive a personally developed offer and to feel special. We strive to know our customers as well as possible and offer them personalised services and products based on their behaviour and preferences.

As digital payment services continue to grow, most providers will be focusing their efforts on instant payments. This is a huge challenge for us all and one we are ready to face thanks to an exciting innovation we recently introduced – our digital wallet. I am certain it

200+

Branches of Postbank across Bulgaria

will be a new, unique and impeccable experience for customers seeking the best solution for managing their personal finances. Customers transfer the contents of their physical wallet, digitally, to their mobile phone. They have the opportunity to add all of their cards, and the wide range of functions provides instant active access to their funds, meaning that they can manage them 24/7. These digital solutions are extremely intuitive, making banking easy, pleasant and fast. You save not only time but also money, since the fees for digital transactions are lower.

One of the biggest investments and innovations we’ve launched at Postbank is our digital self-service zones. These are areas within our branches where customers can carry out most of our main banking transactions themselves without having to be registered for online banking. They simply use a debit or credit card to identify themselves. Digital zones are already functioning in 41 branches across 20 cities nationwide and more locations and service upgrades are yet to be unveiled. Already they are recognised as a preferred alternative to other in-branch services.

**What lies ahead for Postbank in 2021?**

Other than innovative digital products and services, we at Postbank continue focusing our efforts and funds in supporting projects with real added value for society. We believe that one of the greatest benefits we can bring will be building awareness of the need to change life for the better. For the third year in a row we are participating in the ‘Dare to Scale’ project – a four-month programme for growth aimed at entrepreneurs and businesses already past their initial development stage and currently focusing on their activities. The programme is organised by the Bulgarian office of the global entrepreneurial network, Endeavor, with Postbank as the main partner.

It is extremely important for us to be part of this process, to support the ambitions of companies seeking to scale up their business and thus change the entire ecosystem. The current moment presents an abundance of challenges but it will be to our benefit if they can help improve our sustainability and nurture our ability to learn and grow. We at Postbank will share the power of our experience and expertise to support them at the most important stage of their business’s development. In the process we share in their growth. By engaging in partnerships like these, we embrace innovation and foster improved opportunities in the ecosystem as a whole. Investment in entrepreneurship is part of the change that keeps us moving forward. ■

“ THESE DIGITAL SOLUTIONS ARE EXTREMELY INTUITIVE, MAKING BANKING EASY, PLEASANT AND FAST ”