



SOFT LANDING

**COLLABORATE WITH A
NEW STARTUP ECOSYSTEM
AND LEARN HOW TO
SCALE-UP ABROAD**

**STARTUP
EUROPE**



UNITED STATES

ZOETERMEER,
THE NETHERLANDS

BERLIN,
GERMANY

VILNIUS,
LITHUANIA

PARIS,
FRANCE

INDIA

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

Berlin, Germany



5 missions

Paris, France



3 missions

Vilnius, Lithuania



2 missions

Zoetermeer, The Netherlands



4 missions

India



1 mission

19 missions for startups and ecosystem builders



8 startup hubs



200+ ecosystem builders



100 startups and scaleups



3000+ new connections



Boston, New York, Silicon Valley



4 missions



“**Focus is more important than your mother**”

says #ScalingMasterclass speaker Mladen Panov. We grabbed a couple of minutes with Soft-Landing alumnus (Mission to Paris) and COO of Vorwärts to give us some exclusive insight into scaling up in new markets.

F6S: To scale or not to scale?

Mladen Panov: First, you have to ask yourself: "Why am I doing this? What is my goal? Do I want to scale?" I bet that not every startup has taken advantage of its scale-potential just because the founder(s) didn't want to. Scaling is hustling. You have to want it.

Assume the answer to the above question is "yes". Then comes the next one: "When is the right time to scale?"

I strongly believe in the concept of product-market-fit - a point in time where your product is good enough to satisfy the general market demand. You've achieved product-market-fit when you have identified and built the key features your customers demand. Here is the time to scale by investing more in marketing and sales.

F6S: How important is it to be well connected within markets you look to expand into?

MP: Extremely! Not only when expanding, it's totally important (or helpful) to be well connected in general. In German we say Vitamin B (B stays for "Beziehung", meaning "Connection" in German). It's about speed. Connections are shortcuts. They open doors that you in other cases probably wouldn't have opened. Or they open doors much quicker than usual.

Probably, many startups expand successfully without a support system. Again to use one might speed up the process and lead to a more successful expansion. It will help a startup focus on the important stuff like HR, or sales. Here is a simple example: having a support system to help me solve my legal issues like setting up a company, or even opening a bank account in a foreign country is a huge help. For those of you planning to expand to Germany - you must find a support system! Germany's bureaucracy is like no other!

But not only that. A support system can open the door to potential clients, important partners and good recruits. That's extremely valuable.

For us it's out of question that when starting our France expansion, we will turn to IMT Starter (a French support system) first.

F6S: Is there anything even more important than focus?

MP: Let's first clarify what focus means.

When we started working with clients we observed that they have all sorts of problems that can be solved which would result in a variety of products for our portfolio.

In this context I understand focus as concentrating on your single value proposition, on your product/solution and pushing it big. Staying focused is hard. Our mind needs distraction and variation. It's very tempting to accept a new challenge and build something new. The drawback is that you need to split up your resources.

And yes, depending on the situation there are many things that can be more important than focus. You have to have something to focus on in the first place.

Does your business have potential? Is there demand for it? Is your solution attractive for your potential customers? Don't focus on the wrong product.

Which is connected to: is the timing right? Are you building the right product at the right time? IBM tried to develop voice recognition already in the 60's. It was too early. They stopped it.

Is your founding team a good fit? Most startups fail because the founding team doesn't get along. Fortunately, I've experienced this twice - I've learned a lot.

F6S: What was your most challenging lesson learnt in the last year?

MP: That "Focus is more important than your mother." Stay tuned. I'll share more about this in my talk at Scaling up in Europe - MASTERCLASS, Google for Startups, Madrid on 1st October, 14:50.

F6S: Your biggest founder confession?

MP: I ended up by chance in the startup world 6 years ago when I was 25. I had to teach myself a lot of stuff the hard way - by failing.

I'm not a born founder like the guys who started with their lemonade stand when they were 11. By 13 they had taught themselves how to code and started building websites for others... you get the point. Hearing all those "talented entrepreneurs" stories has always exerted a lot of pressure on me, and probably on some of you too.

If this is the case, rest assured - entrepreneurship is like a craft. You learn it, you get better at it and if you are persistent enough you succeed. Peace!

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MEET THE SOFT-LANDERS

Connect with our alumni to learn all about their experience of scaling-up in Berlin, Paris, Vilnius, Zoetermeer, India and the United States.

 soft-landing.eu/alumni



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