

Management, Measurement and Storage Are the New Logic for the Development of Electricity Infrastructure

*Vladimir Georgiev, Head of Production at El Kontrol
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About the company

EL KONTROL is a Bulgarian engineering company founded in 1999 in Stara Zagora. It specializes in complex projects in energy, electricity distribution and industry. Its activities cover design, engineering, electrical installation, construction, testing and commissioning, automation, production of electrical switchboards, and servicing of industrial electronics. The company has experience in building, reconstructing and modernizing high-, medium- and low-voltage electrical switchgear and substations, as well as integrating automation and control systems. Its projects span a range of applications in power infrastructure and industry.

EL KONTROL runs its own production of electrical switchboards and switchgear and works with technologies from leading international manufacturers. Alongside its traditional lines of business, the company is expanding its expertise in renewable energy solutions, battery energy storage systems and energy management. Its accumulated engineering and manufacturing experience allows it to deliver complex energy projects from design and production through installation, automation and commissioning. This approach unites the different stages of a project and ensures full integration of the individual systems and facilities. Since 2013, EL KONTROL has operated outside Bulgaria, and in 2021 it established EL KONTROL GmbH in Germany.

Dear Mr. Georgiev, to begin our conversation: how would you briefly describe El Kontrol's vision of the new logic of electricity infrastructure and the company's role in its development?

Every new capacity, whether a wind farm, a solar park or an energy storage system (BESS), must be designed, built, synchronized and connected in a way that does not endanger the stability of the whole system. This is where companies like El Kontrol come in. We stand behind the engineering side of this energy transition: from designing power facilities, through producing electrical switchboards and switchgear, to building substations and integrating automated control systems.

In recent years El Kontrol has actively expanded into energy management systems (EMS) and energy storage solutions (BESS). What are the most interesting projects you are working on at the moment, and what trends do you see in this segment?

Indeed, in recent years we have gained serious experience in implementing energy management systems and automated control of electrical substations. As the market for battery storage systems has grown, we now deliver complex solutions covering both the substation and the BESS installation. This is in fact an innovation of ours that sets us apart: a single SCADA system controls and monitors both installations. For the customer, this means one common environment for monitoring and control instead of separate systems that would have to be integrated afterwards.

It is worth explaining the role of the unified SCADA platform. When the substation and the battery park are managed from two separate monitoring centers, any inconsistency in the data (a delay in measurement, a different update frequency, a different protocol) creates risk at exactly the moments when the response has to be instantaneous, for example during a sudden change in load or a grid fault. When everything goes through one system, the operator sees the whole picture at once and can make decisions based on real, synchronized data.

We are currently finishing work on two such sites. Each has a power of 80 MW and a storage capacity of 320 MWh. In recent years El Kontrol has established itself as one of the companies that commission such projects, and in parallel we build the step-up substations through which the generating capacities connect to the grid. As for trends in the segment, BESS installations are definitely already part of the energy picture of the future. Bulgaria recorded the highest growth rate in Europe in this segment and is among the first European markets in installed battery capacity for electricity storage.

You recently broke ground on the new production base for electrical switchboards and switchgear. How is the project progressing, and how will the new production increase the company's capacity and technological capabilities?

The investment is already at an advanced stage. It is a new factory for the production of low- and medium-voltage electrical switchboards and switchgear. We have chosen reliable contractors, and construction is on schedule so far. At the same time, we are recruiting new staff. We follow an internal team development plan and pay considerable attention to this process. We are also acquiring new automated machines to optimize our production processes and warehouse management. All of this will allow us to increase capacity and consolidate our position as one of the leading manufacturers of electrical switchboards and switchgear in the country. I believe the boom in energy storage projects we see in Bulgaria will spread to other markets. That is why expanding production is a natural step: it will let us take on larger projects and develop our business in other European and international markets.

El Kontrol holds licenses to produce type-tested electrical switchboards of leading global manufacturers. How does this contribute to the quality of your solutions and the company's competitiveness?

El Kontrol holds production licenses from Siemens, ABB and Schneider Electric, three of the most recognizable brands in the industry. We produce type-tested Siemens SIVACON S8 switchboards, ABB System PowerPro distribution systems and Schneider Electric OKKEN, and we also complete Siemens NXAIR air-insulated switchgear.

For our customers this means, in practice, a wider choice of solutions tailored to their specific needs. They get a guarantee of reliable operation of the installed capacities, cost optimization, and access to these manufacturers' latest technological developments. But that covers only the product side. Our service includes delivery, installation and maintenance of the systems, so the client receives a complete solution. This matters because in such projects the individual elements cannot be considered in isolation. The switchboard, protections, automation, communications and monitoring systems must work as one whole. This, in my view, is the role of an engineering company: not just to supply equipment, but to integrate it into a working system.

There is also something many customers value but which is rarely talked about: a production license means we have gone through the manufacturer's entire audit and certification process, and the product meets established standards. The customer receives a switchboard that has actually been tested according to that manufacturer's methodologies and carries the corresponding guarantee for behavior under overload or short circuit.

Do you plan to take part in international technical exhibitions to present your engineering solutions and products? Which technologies and developments do you expect to attract the most interest among international partners, and how do such forums support the company's development?

In November this year we will present our newest products and solutions at the Enlit Europe international exhibition in Vienna. We expect interest from industrial enterprises, system operators and companies looking for partners to carry out energy projects. We are actively preparing for the exhibition. El Kontrol will have its own stand in Hall A. Visitors will be able to see, live and interactively, our relay panels, SCADA automation panels, and an OKKEN distribution system built by us. Forums like this are an opportunity to meet companies from different sectors who, in conversation with us, learn that El Kontrol, besides being a manufacturer of electrical systems and switchgear, is also a full integrator able to take on an energy project from end to end.

How do you see the energy market developing in the coming years, and what is El Kontrol's long-term vision for expanding its activities and introducing new technologies?

The market for building battery systems and renewable generating capacity (wind and solar) will continue to grow, and we will keep working in this segment. We are expanding the team that handles tasks related to digitalization, automation and the construction of

power infrastructure facilities, and at the same time we are increasing our production capacity, as already mentioned. Our long-term vision is to develop the company as an integrator of complex solutions. We are guided by a practical idea: to make things easier for the client. We manage all the individual stages of a project through to its successful completion, so that the whole facility works as intended. This way the client has one partner who accompanies them along the entire project path, from concept to commissioning.
