Handelsblatt: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Till Hoppe

Handelsblatt: Mr Inzko, protests against the Government had quite a turnout. How frustrated are the people?

Valentin Inzko: The protesters are angry because the politics of this country is producing no results. I have spoken to these people: these are urban people, young and educated people, but also the elderly who are fed up with living their lives at the same old tempo and lacking a real perspective. They demand greater rule of law, as well as realization of the premise of Sir Karl Popper: "All life is problem-solving". To be in politics does not mean taking care of one's own interests or interests of a political party. Instead it means resolving problems of the people, not creating them.

Handelsblatt: Can the protesters really change something?

Valentin Inzko: Yes, surely. Although I am surprised at how insensitive the politicians are and how little attention they are paying to the protesters. There are politicians who think the protests will not achieve anything and are just a waste of time. I think they are wrong.

Handelsblatt: Economy of this country has been stagnating for years. To what extent is BiH politics responsible for this?

Valentin Inzko: It bears the main responsibility. However, the global crisis emerged as an additional problem. First of all, there is too much history and politics and too little economic activity. There are many representatives of foreign companies here, such as Volkwagen, Arcelor-Mittal, Raiffeisen or Meggle. There could be even more of them with better conditions for investments.

Handelsblatt: What should be the first thing to change?

Valentin Inzko: Many companies complain about indecisiveness

or actions taken by institutions which are difficult to comprehend. For example, a German investor has been waiting for a more modern law in the area of forestry for four years now. Another problem is the presence of many conflicting rules, for example in tax regulations and labor policies. Relevant politicians are aware of these problems and the sooner they overcome them the better for the investment climate in the country.

Handelsblatt: Is the International Community not insistent enough when it comes to changes?

Valentin Inzko: I have been here for four years, and the ambassadors and international organizations are more dissatisfied with the conduct of politicians than ever before. There have already been some informal proposals, but no decisions have been made regarding our future actions. In any event, we should think about a new strategy.

Handelsblatt: What should that strategy look like?

Valentin Inzko: We need a greater cooperation among donors. Support must be better coordinated and conditioned. For the past seven years, the International Community's policy has been pretty reserved in order to allow politicians to gradually assume greater responsibility. However, the country has been stagnating during this time.

Handelsblatt: When will BiH, if at all, join the EU?

Valentin Inzko: The EU path requires difficult changes in many areas. This can only be tackled by a state with functioning structures. Only a radical change in political thinking can speed up the EU accession process. Considering that the existing politics is entrenched in ethnic and territorial patterns, it is hardly likely that any progress will be achieved.