

derStandard.at: Interview with High Representative Valentin Inzko

By Sebastian Pumberger

derStandard.at: Criticism of the protesters asking for a permanent solution to the personal identification number issue is: when politicians in Bosnia get active it is because they want to strengthen their own positions. Do these protests change anything?

Valentin Inzko: I am surprised how insensitive the politicians are and how deaf they are to the protests. There are politicians who think protests achieve nothing and people only waste their time. They should look at things differently, opportunistically if nothing else, although it would be much better if they did it for substantial reasons. I also wonder if these are not the consequences of the communist era. After a totalitarian regime, many are not used to the citizens protesting freely, peacefully and democratically and expressing their opinions with dignity.

derStandard.at: Are there any changes with regard to the citizens' fears?

Valentin Inzko: I think the people protesting have rid themselves of their fears. They feel free. I spoke to these people, also on the second night when I negotiated to lift the blockade of the Parliament. These people are city folk, young, educated people, but also old people who have simply had enough. The issue of the JMBG was the well known drop that overfilled the glass.

The protests are peaceful. This is good for the image of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There has been enough of bloodshed in this country, 100,000 dead. The 11th of July is approaching, the Remembrance Day for Srebrenica, when yet no other burial will be done for hundreds of bodies. People have had enough of that, enough of politics, and they have made this clear. We, as the international community, wondered that it took so long.

derStandard.at: Did you expect the protests sooner?

Valentin Inzko: Oh yes. There are people in Bosnia living off 80 EUR; this is the lowest pension. Even if we add to this some 100 EUR from relatives, for example, from Austria, it is still a small sum and far below the poverty line. Food here is almost as expensive as in Austria. It is surprising for us all that they endured so long – among other things, because of the fact that the neighboring countries go forward so fast. On July 1 Croatia becomes an EU member, Serbia will get a candidacy status soon, Montenegro has provisionally concluded two chapters of the negotiations, and Albania has held a democratic election – all of them are marching forward. But, Bosnia stagnates or reverses its development.

derStandard.at: In one of your articles you have criticized the Bosnian politicians of having lost touch with the population. How would you describe the situation?

Valentin Inzko: Bosnia is different from all other countries of the EU enlargement. In those countries both politicians and the population had the same position, they all wanted membership. Here, 80 percent or more of the population wants it, and the politicians behave ambivalently on this issue or they are not doing enough to fulfill that desire. We do not see that Brussels is attractive in any way for the politicians who are currently in power. Bosnia is therefore an exception. We, as the international community, would have to devise a new strategy.

derStandard.at: How would it look like?

Valentin Inzko: There are already informal proposals, but there are still no decisions. There must be better coordination and conditioning of financial support to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Better coordination of international financiers is needed. In agriculture, for example, the first payment has already been suspended.

There are also considerations that politicians would be received only by the lowest ranking officials. So if a minister comes to an EU country, he would be welcomed only by the head of a sector. Suspension of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the membership in the Council of Europe has already been mentioned in the discussions in the European Parliament.

derStandard.at: What would be an additional option?

Valentin Inzko: Not to extend deadlines any longer. We need not to constantly run after the politicians. There are also considerations to remove office holders, i.e. to use again the so-called Bonn powers. It is a matter that goes on slowly, but concrete decisions have not yet been made. Of course I could issue a decision, but it is better if I am supported by 12 states in my international Steering Board.

derStandard.at: To what extent has the problem with JMBG changed the situation?

Valentin Inzko: There are some new approaches and overwhelming frustration within the international community. I have been for four years here, and ambassadors and international organizations are currently so dissatisfied with the behavior of politicians, as it has not been the case so far. The issue of JMBG was the well known drop that overfilled the glass.

derStandard.at: Have you thought about using your special powers, the so-called Bonn powers?

Valentin Inzko: I have thought about that, but the philosophy of the international community is now such that the local process is being preferred. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended 18 years ago. It is time for Bosnia and Herzegovina to start taking more and more responsibility. Therefore, the local process has the preference. But if it fails, there might be considerations of using Bonn powers. If I said before that frustration had never been greater, then it means that the willingness to use the Bonn powers is also more evident than ever – but nothing has been decided yet.

Der Standard.at: Let's go back to the attitude of politicians towards population: Has that attitude changed during four years of your mandate?

Valentin Inzko: No, it has become even worse. There has been a clear censorship at work here. After the war, we witnessed eleven years of fantastic development. It was followed by the ownership phase, and, essentially, everything has been stagnating ever since. There have not been any huge projects accepted; institutions have not been created; important legislation has not been enacted. The stagnation is lasting for seven years already, and the frustration has clearly grown in last four years.

Der Standard.at: How do you see developments in the future? Is the incumbent political leadership going to bring this country closer to the EU?

Valentin Inzko: This political leadership will succeed in doing that only if it makes a radical change. With the current policy, I do not see the future; that policy no longer has strength. Those are old patterns, and these patterns partially represent a continuation of the 1992-1995 conflict, with the Clausewitz's inversion: It is a continuation of war with political and psychological means. Many are held captive by territorial patterns and do not think about what could be done with the country in terms of quality.

Der Standard.at: How important is the complex state structure in this situation?

Valentin Inzko: The Dayton Treaty is a peace agreement and it was fantastic as such. The Constitution is an Annex and everybody knew that it was not perfect. As far as the structures are concerned, it is necessary to identify a new approach. The Federation is now starting with some kind of rationalization. Synergies could be identified there. We could ask whether or not each of the ten Cantons needs a Minister of Interior or entire Assembly. We could consider whether or not a single veto could block everything. Theoretically speaking, a veto can still always be invoked.

But we still have not reached that far. There is dissatisfaction among citizens with non-functioning of the State structures. There are more than 140 Ministers in this country. If each one of them acted as an excellent manager for BiH, he could stay. If somebody does a good job, it is ok, but if we had nine bad state leaders in Austria, the population would also wonder if these leaders simply cost too much money.

Der Standard.at: Should the international community lead the process?

Valentin Inzko: It would be better for the local institutions to do it. The current discussion on the constitutional reform of the Federation involves many local experts; the process has been developed under the auspices of the

US Embassy. But, even with the worst of constitution, things can be done if there is will to do them.

Dear Standard.at: What is the role of corruption in the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Valentin Inzko: It is almost like the air we breathe. The difference is that the air renders life possible and corruption kills life, society and state. It is, unfortunately, the case throughout the Balkans. Corruption in Bosnia is wide-spread: in schools, in hospitals, at universities at the rate that we, unfortunately, cannot even imagine. Fight against corruption is just at a takeoff stage here.

Der Standard.at: Protesters demand a law, which will regulate the JMBG in a long-term, by June 30. What do you expect after that date?

Valentin Inzko: I also want that. Is it realistic? I do not know. There is an interim solution now, which is valid until December. The JMBG can be assigned to citizens until that time. However, protesters want a permanent solution and they will certainly not give up their demands. Protesters are nice people who just want to exercise their democratic right. Democracy does not happen once every four years; the people here have come to that realization now. Politicians, unfortunately, still do not realize that.