

Interview: Valentin Inzko, EU Special Representative and High Representative in BiH: “Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be a perfect country next year either”

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The Austrian Valentin Inzko, high representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, about the future of the country standing on its own two feet

The Austrian Valentin Inzko holds one of the highest positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). He is the High Representative of the international community and has the authority to remove the democratically elected officials and pass the laws. “The High Representative cannot stay forever”, said Inzko in the interview with derStandard.at. B&H and the majority of the EU countries also support the closure of the Office of the High Representative. Whether this can take place already by end of this year, will be decided in November.

Although Inzko thinks that there is a need for the reforms even 14 years after the war, he is still optimistic when it comes to the future of B&H standing “on its own two feet”. Regardless to that he stays in the country as the EU Special Representative.

derStandard.at: The Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina should perhaps be closed by the end of this year. Is that already fixed?

Valentin Inzko: It will come to a transition, namely from the Office of the High Representative to a strengthened Office of the EU Special Representative. The Peace Implementation Council will consult on the concrete time plan for the transition in the mid November. I hold at present both mandates, and now as the EU Special Representative I already have 30 employees. This number should be increased to 80 employees in the course of the transition. However, it could be decided to extend the OHR mandate. The majority of the EU member countries support the closure of the OHR.

derStandard.at: It is constantly repeated that the OHR hindered a positive development by taking away the independence but also the responsibility from the domestic politics.

Valentin Inzko: The Bosnians will have to be able to stand more on their own feet and be more willing to make compromise. But there is always the discussion, like in the medicine, whether one should throw away the cast from the leg rather earlier or later? However, I think it is time to consider whether B&H could find its way without OHR. The High Representative cannot stay forever. The international community will keep its presence for a long time, but rather in the role of a mediator. Our assistance could be helpful particularly with the reconciliation and the functioning of the state.

derStandard.at: You said that you were “a moderate optimist” regarding the creation of a political climate by the end of the year, which will make the closure of the OHR really possible. However, until today no solution is visible in the discussions about the constitutional reform, and the representatives of the three nationalities block each other in the Government.

Valentin Inzko: Clearly B&H will not be a perfect country next year and I do not have any illusions about that. A more comprehensive constitutional reform would be desirable. But such a reform takes time also in other countries. There will be no big bang in B&H but rather a “light” constitutional reform. Currently we are expecting a decision to be passed by the European Court for Human Rights regarding the complaint from Jakob Finci, president of the Jewish Community, that minorities, as for example the Jews, may not run for election in the country for certain offices. At present only the members of the three nationalities can run for the election.

derStandard.at: Do you think that the complicated state structure could be simplified?

Valentin Inzko: Bosnia and Herzegovina will never be a centralised state. However, I hope that it will experience more prosperity despite the complicated structure. One should also not leave out the possibility that the parties in question could find a common language and simplify the structure.

derStandard.at: The so called “Bonner powers” (the High Representative has the authority to, among other things, remove the democratically elected officials and pass the laws) will cease to apply after the closure of OHR?

Valentin Inzko: Yes, but I would still be in charge for the monitoring of the implementation of the Dayton Agreement and have a kind of arbitrary function. Regardless to that, there are, of course, possibilities for sanctions. For example, the EU projects could be stopped, visas for certain politicians could be forbidden or their bank accounts frozen.

derStandard.at: Your predecessor, Miroslav Lajčák, stated recently that the international community “does not know what it wants” and that it “does not have clear rules”. How do you comment this?

Valentin Inzko: There are 27 architects in the EU and it is of course not easy to construct a building. But we have very good foundations. The EU rules are more concrete than one thinks and the entry strategies are clear. And there are also clear criteria for everybody regarding the visa liberalisation procedure. Out of 174 points B&H has fulfilled approximately 150. I assume that B&H can fulfil its remaining tasks in this regard until June 2010.

derStandard.at: Once you said that B&H could join the EU in 2014. Is this deadline still realistic?

Valentin Inzko: 2014 is probably too optimistic. However, it would be a nice symbol if B&H and other Balkan countries could join the EU at the 100th anniversary of the Sarajevo assassination and the beginning of the First World War. (Manuela Honsig-Erlenburg, derStandard.at, 21.8.2009)

The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina as the head of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) supervises since 1995 the implementation of the civil part of the Dayton Agreement. The current holder of this position is **Valentin Inzko** who, at the same time, has the mandate of the EU Special Representative for B&H.

From 1993 to 1999 he was the Austrian Ambassador in Sarajevo who organised and opened the Embassy. From 1995 to 2005 he worked in the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna as the Head of Department for Central, East and Southeast Europe, Central Asia and South Caucasus. Prior to his current position Inzko was also Austrian Ambassador.