

**INTERVIEW OF HEAD OF PRESENCE, AMBASSADOR BERND BORCHARDT,  
AND SENIOR DEMOCRATIZATION OFFICER, SIHANA NEBIU, AT “7 PA 5”  
MORNING TV SHOW ON VIZION PLUS  
21 June 2018**

**We will talk about a project called Youth Trail which started yesterday, from 20 to 24 June, where young people from all the region come to us to interact, discuss about issues of democracy, peace and security. What is this project, Mr. Ambassador?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** We started this project for the first time last year. We thought that it would be a good idea to bring young people from the region together, and to discuss with them about OSCE values and about OSCE activities, to share experiences from different countries. When I supported this project, I was also inspired by my own experiences when I was as young as these young people. In the 70s of the last century, when I was just finishing school, I went for the first time to France. And that was only 28 years after a terrible war, and all those cruelties and massacres, and still I was very warmly received, and I had a great time. And so, we thought this is something that we should here in the Balkans as well. My colleague Sihana is organizing the project. We organized Youth Trail last year and what motivated us much to do it again was not only that we found an enormous interest in the region – 500,000 clicks on social media, which is impressive – but also what even moved me a bit, that at the end the young people told us their main experience was that they have so much more in common than what divided them.

**What is the project about?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** There are a number of workshops where the young people are discussing with moderators about gender issues, democracy, anti-corruption measures, and so on. But of course also some outdoor activities, some fun, a concert on Saturday.

**Sihana, why is co-operation among youth important?**

**Sihana Nebiu:** Youth Trail is a programme designed to bring youth together. They are relatively young, between 18 to 24 years old, and there are many differences and lack of knowledge amongst youth in the Western Balkans. We noticed that in Youth Trail last year, and we see it even this year. At the start, they know very little about one-another, but in the end we noticed how many common things they have and how much they can interact to create a better joint future for the region.

**This event is taking place the second year in a row in Albania. Maybe it is good not only for the youth to know one-another, but it is also a good ad and a good promotion for Albania.**

**Sihana Nebiu:** For almost half of the participants, this was the first time they came to Albania, mostly those from countries a bit far from Albania. It was an opportunity for them to see a new environment, to overcome prejudice and stereotypes they may have had about countries, not only for Albania, but also for other countries in the region.

### **How are participants selected?**

**Sihana Nebiu:** Selection of participants is done through an open call for application. All youth from the region are invited.

### **Do they need to have been engaged before, for example in civil society?**

**Sihana Nebiu:** Not necessarily. We look for participants who are young, who have very good motivation, but not necessarily any previous experience. In this context, we also select young people who have the desire, but lack the chance. Those having previous experience meant that they were given a chance and that is why they have been active and engaged in many activities.

### **When we say region, what does it imply? What is the span?**

**Sihana Nebiu:** Western Balkans.

### **It will take place from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of June. Is there a grand finale planned or something?**

**Sihana Nebiu:** The event was launched yesterday in a solemn opening. Now intensive activities kick off with different workshops. There will also be cultural workshops and events; we will have handicraftsmen from Kruja, who will show us the traditional way of making their items. We will also organize sightseeing and a Scavenger Hunt for them to find different places in Tirana. The programme will close with a youth concert taking place at *Reja* in the evening of 23 June.

### **We emphasised that there is a lot of hardship in the Balkans. One of the hardships, or maybe good things, is the Justice Reform. Mr. Ambassador, in your view, how is the justice reform in Albania progressing?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** The justice reform has merits being praised by the EU, the Commission of the Union. Also the OSCE has several times taken a very positive position concerning the justice reform. This is an enormously courageous endeavour, and we are convinced that this is going to take not only the justice system in your country but the whole country forward.

### **We have been often told this is the strictest justice system reform when compared to other countries of the region or of the EU. Should our reform be taken as an example, or must we wait and see how implementation goes and then decide whether it is worth taking as an example?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** Since the end of the communist system, justice reform has taken place basically in all countries of the region, with different intensity and with different approaches. In particular, the very thorough vetting process to the best of my knowledge has not been done so thoroughly in other countries. The reform is always based on the justice system, and justice systems develop differently depending on the culture of the country. In the rest of the Western Balkans, the foundations of the system were different, and from there they developed in different directions. Here it has a different foundation, so a reform process would be different automatically.

**Despite the reforms and all the praises we get for the reform, still, the political climate in Albania seems more tense than ever. How do you see that?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** You remember that I worked here as German Ambassador from 2007 to 2010. Just to put it mildly, the political climate did not get better. That was a disappointment. The harshness of the political conflict sometimes it is... one has to get used to it, to put it that way. But what is good to hear is that young people, many young people are talking with and that we work with, most of them do not like that. So, I hope it is going to change.

**Is it normal to have such a climate of mistrust among political forces and does this damage the image of Albania? You said things should change, but do Albanian politicians understand they should work together for major issues and leave aside minor torments and stalemates?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** The way of interaction can certainly be improved, become more constructive, become also more human. Not just condemning others and telling bad stories about others, massive accusations without foundations. That is a way where politics, political elites can develop in a different direction, and I hope it will. And as I said, when I talk to younger politicians or with younger voters, this is expected.

**In the electoral reform committee, it seems the parties are co-operating. It seems like they are getting along and without quarrels, at least. What is your opinion on that, since you observe and support this committee?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** The approach in the ad hoc committee has been very constructive. There was agreement found to develop a work plan, which is standing. This work plan consists mainly of dealing with eight different topics in the context of electoral reform, from vote buying to out of country voting, to electronic voting and other issues, of course, the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. We and also our colleagues from the Council of Europe have started to organize workshops on these eight topics. Five of these workshops have been done now and I had a very positive impression about the discussions. There seems to be some room for compromise. Three workshops are still going to follow. In early July we will finish this programme. Then, it is of course up to the politicians – they have to take the political decision, this is not for us. And then there needs to be a drafting of legal changes. Then, we can come in again with our friends from ODIHR in Warsaw and comment on drafts, see whether the drafts are technically up to the best European standards.

**What is the risk of the electoral reform being conducted at the expenses of smaller parties? The latter are always scared it can happen.**

**Bernd Borchardt:** Apart from the out of country voting, there are no ideas so far discussed about a substantial change of the electoral system. And one issue, for instance, would even benefit the smaller parties. One of the concerns often raised is that during the counting there are votes systematically miscounted or not counted or counted in favour of the bigger parties. With an electronic counting system these concerns could be alleviated.

**Everything started from the discussion on whether there is vote-buying or not. Shouldn't we actually start from establishing trust among the parties? Because there is this perception that if there is trust among the parties, then everything goes well in Albania.**

**Bernd Borchardt:** Trust is something that is growing slowly. That is like the political climate, which has to improve. But you can eliminate areas in which you have mistrust. I just gave you the example of the electronic counting of votes. You eliminate the human factor, because you do not mistrust the machines, you mistrust the people who are counting. There is a limited number of other fields, where you could also replace the human factor by incorruptible machines. Like, for instance, the electronic voter identification. There are often allegations heard that people are going around Saturday afternoon buying or borrowing ID cards for two days so that friends of one party do not go to vote. With a biometric identification you cannot sell your fingertip, your fingerprint. On the other hand, there are also many other allegations about vote buying so it does not solve the whole problem, it solves a piece. The rest is an issue of finding other ways to prevent vote buying. More transparency of party finances, for instance. This is a very important issue, where we made our recommendation during the aforementioned workshop. Or more training for prosecutors – how to prosecute this kind of electoral crimes. Albania has already very high punishments foreseen in its criminal code for vote buying. If there is political agreement, this can be raised further. They would have a deterrent effect as well.

**Next year we have local elections. Should we hurry up? Are we late? Because it has happened in the past that the deadline expired and they said there was no more time. Will we give it a try in the next elections?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** One of the issues where we are not yet too late, but where we are already quite advanced is the issue of the wish to do the electronic voting. There must be a test run. That is our very strong recommendation. And for that the best option is during the local elections. And you have to take a decision, what kind of electronic voting you do; then you have to write the terms of reference for the purchase of the machinery; then you have to do it through the procurement process; then you have to have people who certify the machines that they are fool proof and not manipulated; then you have to train the people who run the machines, and so on. And then, don't forget, you have to explain it to the voters. You have to run an intensive campaign so that people understand what is going to happen. Young people are all on *Facebook* and they know how to run electronic things. My mother wouldn't have known that.

**There is an issue where the OSCE has been investing a lot lately, the country's communist past. Why should Albanians face their communist past?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** Legacies of the past shape democratic societies and have an impact on the societies and on the institutions for a long time. I have grown up in a country, Germany, which very-very slowly started to deal with the past. When I was a kid, a youngster, I have a recollection of a quite authoritarian society. Now the society has emancipated from that. There are still, of course authoritarian individuals and people, but the country has developed and has become an established democracy. And I strongly believe that the dealing with the past, which in Germany only started 25 years after the war in a more intensive way, that this contributed a lot to this process. You mentioned the mistrust earlier. This mistrust is a typical legacy of post-totalitarian, post-dictatorial countries. You have this experience that your neighbour, even family members could betray you, tell what you have said to the State Security. This remains in your head, and this has to grow out. The best way to grow out is by discussing about these matters, by learning about them. I was very positively impressed that Albania started opening the files of the *Sigurimi*, as it was done in Germany with the files of

the Stasi in the Communist East. All this helped a lot to regain confidence. Because then you know – this person has betrayed me, but these persons, who I might have had a bad feeling, did not do that.

**You mentioned the country you come from, Germany, and I don't think that there are people today, after two dictatorships, holding the portrait of Hitler or Erich Honecker. Here in Albania it happens and quite often. Does this indicate the very fragile balance holding our country? We are a small country. Probably we will need more time?**

**Bernd Borchardt:** As I just mentioned, this process in Germany after WWII, and after the Nazi dictatorship, started in the late 1960s. That was 25 years after the war. It took a long time. Just two-three years ago, a movie was shown about the Auschwitz trial. And it was called "The maze of silence". That was the attitude in the society still in the 1960s. So, it takes time until the society develops in this direction. And in the eastern part of Germany there are still nostalgics of the communist regime. The number, in my perception, is declining, but there are still people who think like that.

**So, you think we are on the right track? We just need some more time? But we have no more time to lose.**

**Bernd Borchardt:** Yes, and that is why the OSCE has supported this process. This is a process that your society has to deal with, but we can help by bringing in experiences from other countries. Not only from Germany, although it is closer to my heart, but also from other countries that dealt with their communist past and other dictatorships.