

Oslobođenje: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



By: Vildana Selimbegović

Oslobođenje: Mr. Inzko, your letter to the Speaker of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, Nedeljko Cubrilovic, and to the parliamentary clubs provoked fierce reactions in Republika Srpska. The most difficult qualification coming from Banja Luka is that in the letter you implied the collective responsibility of the Serb people for the crimes committed.

When I sent the letter to the RSNA leadership, I intended to use the *silenzio stampa* approach, meaning that I did not send the letter to journalists, in order to give time to relevant political factors to think seriously, soberly, without any outbursts of passion so they could make good, wise decisions. However, the inversion of arguments, unintentionally or as a good spin, coming from some commentators of that letter motivated me to break the silence. The claim that Valentin Inzko holds Serbs collectively responsible for crimes is, to put it mildly, shameful. In addition, it shows a lack of basic legal knowledge, common sense or even general knowledge.

First, there is no collective responsibility for war crimes committed, nor has the Hague Tribunal tried peoples, but individuals from ethnic groups for whom it had reasonable doubt or sufficient evidence of personal responsibility. Further, it wasn't Valentin Inzko who awarded decorations to deserving individuals with final and binding verdicts from The

Hague for grave crimes against humanity; it was the leadership of the RS National Assembly. So, the former speakers of the RS National Assembly, its leadership and heads of the parliamentary clubs, on behalf of the people, decided to reward people who are globally known for war crimes.

Who is it then that imposes collective responsibility on the people, not for the war crime committed, but for the glorification of war criminals – Valentin Inzko or the National Assembly? I have a feeling that some commentators of my letter missed the distinction between the responsibility for war crimes and that for the glorification of war crimes. I was talking about imposing collective responsibility for the glorification of war crimes. Parliamentary decorations cannot change the legal facts documented at the ICTY. It is self-deception, manipulation of the people, but also a conflict with the whole civilized world. Therefore, I expect political stakeholders to think carefully before making the decision, to think carefully about what kind of future they are creating for their children. We cannot change the past, but we can create a better and happier future for all people in this tormented country.

Oslobodjenje: You have said many times: “There are no bad peoples, there are only bad individuals.” Apart from our interviews, you uttered this sentence during the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide at the commemoration in Potocari. How, then, do you explain the fact that what individuals read from your letter is the imposition of collective responsibility for war crimes even though you have repeatedly reiterated that there is no collective responsibility? What is it about?

Valentin Inzko: Indeed, that sentence, that there are no bad peoples, is something I have repeated very often in the past 12 years. And I heard that wise thought in 1992 from Rasim Ljajic, as a young politician from Novi Pazar, when I was working there as an OSCE observer. It seems to me, from my

life-long experience in this region, that I should add another one, that the peoples here are good, but that they often have problems with bad leaders. As to why some misread my letter, I'm not entirely sure. At first I thought they misunderstood it, and now it seems to me that using the philosophy of attack is the easiest defence. But I do not even want to argue with such people, I want the Serb people to read my message correctly. I demanded the removal of collective responsibility for the glorification of war criminals on their behalf. Namely, the National Assembly decorated convicted war criminals on behalf of the people. Do Serb political leaders want their people to be perceived as supporters of war criminals by the world? That's what I was talking about. I hope they understand the essence of my message.

Oslobođenje: It's not only from the RS, but also from the Federation, people are asking why this letter came now, why didn't you react four years ago?

Valentin Inzko: The same question could be posed to the RS leadership, why did it not react in July 2015? At that time, in its resolution of 9 July, the European Parliament strongly condemned the genocide in Srebrenica and rejected "all forms of its denial, relativisation or misinterpretation."

But let me get back to your question. I reacted the first day the decorations were awarded. You can find my 2016 statement on the OHR website, as well as in the media archives to which the statements were. On the same day, I requested that the decorations awarded to convicted war criminals be annulled, but there was no response. I even cited the example of what a German mayor did that same year when he learned that one of his fellow citizens, otherwise an honorary citizen, had been charged with participating in Nazi crimes in Italy in World War II. He took away his honorary status. We did not see that from the National Assembly then, but the time has come to take measures. **Oslobođenje: Why didn't you give the NARS a three-month deadline on 24 October 2016 to annul the decorations?**

What has changed in the meantime? Did you wait for the circumstances in the world to change?

Valentin Inzko: There are several important factors and circumstances that influenced the decision. You know that Radovan Karadzic received his final verdict only on 20 May 2019, so at the time he was awarded the decoration, he did not yet have the final court ruling. We expected the final verdict to be an opportunity for catharsis, but unfortunately that did not happen. The decision on decorations was not published in the Official Gazette of Republika Srpska, so I did not have, or more precisely, I do not have the opportunity to annul that decision, even today, even if I wanted to. Therefore, the RS National Assembly is the only address where a decision can be made to revoke the awarded decorations. So now the responsibility is in the hands of the relevant political parties in that entity.

Oslobođenje: How is it that the decision on decorations was not published in the Official Gazette? What is it then, a public award of unofficial honorary decorations?

Valentin Inzko: We were unable to find a publication of that decision in the Official Gazette. Ask the Speaker of the Assembly, Čubrilović, how he treats these decorations.

Oslobođenje: Some leaders and analysts claim that your target is Čubrilovic, that he will bear the sanctions?

Valentin Inzko: Čubrilović is not any target; it is only that then, at the time the decorations were awarded, he was the Speaker of the Assembly, as he is now. He is only the first among equals to have a very serious task. There are also parliamentary clubs. I sincerely hope that the problem will be solved successfully.

Oslobođenje: And Dodik, will he bear any sanctions?

Valentin Inzko: This is not about sanctions, they can only be

a means to an end. The goal is to face the past and turn to the future. It has been 25 years since the end of the war, and yet there is still a war going on about historical facts. Dealing with a war past is a long and painful process, but, unfortunately, we are not making any progress; moreover, public discourse is falling further and further behind. It causes great frustration, consumes energy, drives investors away and young people out of the country, etc. It prevents reconciliation, trust-building, a common energy for the common good of all the inhabitants of the country. After all, investments suffer as well. The situation and the fact that young people, mayors, who are presented as new, fresh winds, go to regional televisions and declare that for them Radovan Karadzic is not a war criminal, is alarming.

Oslobođenje: You are talking about Draško Stanivuković?

Valentin Inzko: Yes. And his advisers. But he's not the only one. Such statements aren't perhaps too shocking in Bosnia-Herzegovina because the citizens have already acquired the boiling frog syndrome, but, believe me, they raise some serious alarms in the world's capitals. Serious countries conclude from that that the countries glorifying war criminals aren't welcome in the European family.

So, I want to say that when it comes to this difficult and sensitive issue, BiH should evolve as soon as possible. Figuratively speaking, it should evolve as soon as possible from the frog's into the bird's perspective. The civilized world is shocked at the glorification of convicted war criminals, and when they hear this from young leaders who were babies during the war, then we get a serious sociological diagnosis of the country's condition and priorities for action change.

Oslobođenje: Does that mean that, if the RSNA refuses to revoke the awarded decorations, the whole country will bear sanctions?

Valentin Inzko: I don't wish to speak about sanctions yet. I expect mature responsible politics of all party leaders in the RS. It is their move now. Serbs are courageous and honorable people and I am sure that they are capable of making a good move for their future, and more than that, for the future of their children.

Oslobođenje: In reply to you, Milorad Dodik je, said that one could talk about your request in the letter had you requested the change of certain school and street names in the Federation. Will you do that?

Valentin Inzko: He is right. Last year, when we were making a plan of activities for facing the past – it was one of the measures or steps envisaged and planned for the whole country. But decisions for street and school names are made in city councils and we are waiting for the completion of the electoral process i.e. formation of city councils so that we can send the letter. In the meantime, we had a representative's initiative by the Naša stranka in the state parliament, which I consider to be a good move. It is important that we also have local initiatives and serious discussions on this issue. Besides, historians of this country know, much better than we foreigners, who deserves a street and who doesn't, or who had what role in World War II.

Oslobođenje: Some say that you have woken up and started some initiatives only when it was announced that there is a search for a candidate for your successor. How do you comment on that?

Valentin Inzko: These initiatives were devised and planned much before I learned that a candidate was being sought for my successor or whether the Biden administration was coming and when. You may remember that a year ago, on 6 May 2020, I requested before the UNSC the removal of the memorial plaque devoted to Radovan Karadžić in Pale, and mentioned the glorification of war criminals. Several members of the

Security Council were outraged over this, especially the German ambassador Christoph Heusgen, and some others. You surely know that I asked Milorad Dodik again on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, 11 July 2020, to remove the plaque from the Students' Dormitory in Pale. Since he disregarded my appeal he left me no other option than to set a deadline for its removal. And it was 5 November 2020, again in the UNSC.

Now, concerning my successor, to be completely honest, I had long lost faith of ever getting one. It looked like an impossible wish and mission, and therefore, I am very pleased that it is now very realistic that the OHR will get a new boss this year. I think the OHR is still needed in this country as there is a lot of unfinished work. Bosnia-Herzegovina waited for a long time to be seriously included in the agenda of the world's power centers. I believe this moment has come. This is a unique chance. It's very important that a strong international representative is coming here, from a big, powerful European country, and that he works in synergy with Biden's administration. I expect the change of the international circumstances will lead this country out of the deadlock and place it on secure, accelerated European tracks – a road that the large majority of the citizens want. However, I wish to underline that well-intentioned international initiatives should be understood as positive instead of always thinking of some conspiracies and constructions. The allied forces are still in Germany, which had a limited sovereignty for 45 years, even today. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs several more years of committed international and local engagement to become – not perfect – but a nice, normal country good for all its citizens. And, you also need to know, this country has sincere friends, very committed, among the former high representatives, to pull this country out of its hard past into a better tomorrow.

Oslobođenje: So what would be your farewell message to the

citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Valentin Inzko: To have faith in this miraculous country! And the fundamental message would be best described by a quotation from Karl Jaspers, from the latest book by Christian Schwarz-Schilling: „Peace is only possible through freedom, and freedom is only possible through truth. Therefore, untruth is the real evil that destroys peace“.

Oslobođenje: In Dodik's SNSD they said that they would request that you send them the letter in Serb language and in Cyrillic, and only then talk about your?

Valentin Inzko: I can use the Cyrillic script, I used it in Mongolia for four years, and in Belgrade for four years; I read Glas Srpske in the Cyrillic script every day, so, I don't have a problem with the Cyrillic, on the contrary. If the head of the SNSD club will understand the contents of my letter better if written in Cyrillic, it is not a problem at all. What's important is that they understand the essence of the message in the letter. I'm afraid they are trivializing very serious issues with such statements. And besides, I followed the model of the letter I received from the RS National Assembly, their invitation letter to an awards ceremony, written in the Latin script. One needs to respect all, it's our wealth.