

Glas Srpske: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Veljko Zeljković

There are no bad peoples, but there is also no collective guilt or collective responsibility for war crimes committed, said the High Representative Valentin Inzko in response to the media frenzy caused by his letter addressed at the RSNA, in which he called for the decorations awarded to Radovan Karadžić, Biljana Plavšić, and Momčilo Krajišnik to be annulled. As he said, the RS public has misinterpreted the content of this letter.

- I want the Serb people to understand my message correctly. There is no collective responsibility for the committed war crimes, however, manipulation with the decorations imposes an unnecessary burden on the people's back and I am asking for this burden to be removed. The ICTY dealt with individual criminal responsibility and prosecuted and issued final and binding convictions for individuals, and some of them were decorated for crimes during the armed conflict. This is the problem. This is the point of my letter. By decorating war criminals, the RS NA went against the whole civilized world. Do Serb leaders want institutions which represent citizens to be perceived as supporters of war criminals by the world? I wanted to incentivize them to create a future unburdened with baggage from the past. The RS political elite now has an opportunity to think about what kind of future and social framework they are leaving to the younger generations. I believe Serbs are a brave and a proud people and that they will find a way out of this situation they were pointlessly drawn into. I sincerely wish young Serbs to have as a role model a person whose legacy has marked the entire humankind, Nikola Tesla, to nurture positive values rather than being burdened with the legacy of wartime past - said Inzko in his written response to questions addressed at the OHR by Glas Srpske, regarding the current situation in BiH.

Glas Srpske: Why did you decide to react to the awarding of the decorations only after five years?

Valentin Inzko: I did react on the day the decorations were awarded. My statement from 2016 can be found on the OHR website. On the same day, I requested that the decorations awarded to convicted war criminals be annulled, but there was no response. If I had known what intentions they had on this issue, I would have warned them not to do that, because there would come a day when they would have to revoke them. The final verdict to Karadžić was rendered only on March 20, 2019, and, therefore, I could not make an official request before that date for his award to be revoked. I also could not ask for the removal of the plaque from the Pale Student's Dormitory before that date.

Glas Srpske: Why did you not do the same regarding the plaque awarded to former BiH Army commander Sakib Mahmuljin?

Valentin Inzko: This is a first-instance verdict and as I understood, it will be appealed. Let us wait for the final verdict and see whether the cantonal authorities will act first to remove the decoration. The same principle applies to anyone who is convicted of war crimes, no matter which ethnic group they belong to. To glorify a war criminal is another blow to the victims.

Glas Srpske: Why did you never condemn the denial of crimes against Serbs, and also, for example, the calls to create a Republic of BiH?

Valentin Inzko: There is no place for the glorification of war crimes or war criminals. Period. All victims deserve the same respect. As for calls to create a republic of BiH, as you say, my response is also well known. In fact, it is the same as the one I give to those who talk about secession: Bosnia and Herzegovina is a single, sovereign state comprising of two entities. Anything else is a fantasy.

Glas Srpske: You said once that you were never invited by anyone in the RSNA to come, but when that happened, you refused. Why?

Valentin Inzko: I have not received an invitation. I heard about the request from the media. This, supposedly technical detail aside, in my capacity as the High Representative, I report to the UN Security Council. The last such report was presented in November last year and is available to all. We must all be clear that the country's progress depends solely on the work of local institutions rather than the OHR. As such, asking the High Representative to report on his work is not in line with the GFAP and seems like an attempt to shift the blame for problems arising in

the implementation of the Peace Agreement due to their own inactivity. In short, I report primarily on the situation in the country, not on my work.

Glas Srpske: How do you respond to accusations that you are leading anti-Serb policies?

Valentin Inzko: All my actions were undertaken within the scope of the High Representative's mandate which is clearly defined by the Dayton Peace Agreement. This is also where the response to the second part of your question lies. The role of the High Representative is not to satisfy the interests of political elites, but to implement his mandate as clearly defined. This crucial fact seems to be suitably overlooked by many who choose to blame the High Representative for all that is wrong in this country. I wonder how a lot of the politicians intend to function once the OHR is not there to serve as a scapegoat.

Glas Srpske: Will you impose the Law on Denial of Genocide?

Valentin Inzko: I find it absurd that a country where genocide has happened does not have such a law. To adopt this law would be a great advancement for the country and a guarantee that it will never happen again. It would show maturity and represent a clean break from the tragic past and indicate that country is taking a turn towards a better future. It is wrong to assume, as some want to portray it, that such a law is against any particular ethnic group. Quite the opposite: it is for the benefit of all. The BiH Parliament will have another opportunity later this spring to adopt this law. That would be the best and most durable solution.