

Dnevni list: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By: D. Lukić

Dnevni list: Where is Bosnia and Herzegovina going? Towards a dissolution? You must admit that the current situation does not look good, regardless of some “on-paper” developments on the European road ... (adoption of the Reform Agenda, Labour Law...). What is the meaning of the adoption of the Reform Agenda at all when the state is constantly run by people who deny Bosnia and Herzegovina with their every move and would gladly see the country dissolved into three parts?

Valentin Inzko: BiH's future is crystal clear; it is inside Euro-Atlantic family. This is what the institutions of this country have declared and committed to time and time again. This is the primary foreign policy objective of this country. It is equally clear that the future of this country is reintegration, not disintegration. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH has long been resolved and it is not open for discussion. Full stop. However, what I am concerned about is speed. A sense of urgency is missing. People are not living in the future, but today.

Efforts should be focused on the future and not the past. Officials should expend their energy implementing the reform agenda to create new jobs that will keep the talented and hardworking people of this country here. Instead we see energy being wasted on a referendum which violates the Peace Agreement.

Dnevni list: It is a fact that Milorad Dodik, Bakir Izetbegović and Dragan Čović currently have the main say in BiH politics. This is not really a guarantee for prosperity (my view). Do you agree? I am not saying that it would be better if Radončić, Komšić... were in government.

Valentin Inzko: It is not for the International Community to choose BiH's political leaders. The voters have made their choice, but their responsibilities did not end when they walked out of the polling stations. Democracy begins with a ballot, but it does not end there. What we need is for citizens to be more active in ensuring that elected officials meet their obligations. Nobody forced any of the individuals you mentioned to be a political leader. They are not martyrs, they made a free choice to enter politics and now we expect them to meet all of their obligations. This includes fully respecting the Peace Agreement and delivering the reforms they have signed up to and which are necessary to take the country forwards. This is all about them meeting their obligations and delivering concrete results. The spotlight is on them. They know this. We know this. Why? Because the entire country and the International Community know that they call the shots in their respective parties. There is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide from the spotlight. Now is the time for results. But it is obvious that bigger parties bear more responsibility than smaller ones; also those who are in power a longer period than others.

Dnevni list: Specifically, what is the fate of Dodik's referendum on the Court and Prosecutor's Office of BiH? Are you going to use the Bonn powers and remove Dodik if he puts his intention into action? What would the holding of the referendum mean for the state? Can you comment on the fact that Izetbegović is strongly opposed to the referendum while Čović is hardly at all against it. Speaking to the media, he said that Dodik's referendum could have a positive use...

Valentin Inzko: The proposed referendum represents a direct and serious violation of the Peace Agreement. It is irresponsible and highly damaging that after close to two decades we continue to see such challenges to the Peace Agreement. It would be great if all of this effort was being put into creating jobs for the young people of this country instead. More young people would be staying and building their future here rather than voting with their feet. Sadly that is not yet the case.

Let us be crystal clear again. The Dayton Agreement, including the Constitution of BiH, as set forth in Annex 4 of the Dayton Agreement, never intended to limit the existence of state institutions to those explicitly mentioned in the Constitution of BiH, but quite to the opposite, the Constitution explicitly provided for the establishment of additional state institutions. The State judiciary is firmly grounded in the Peace Agreement and the Constitution of this country. The BiH Constitutional Court has ruled that the State Court and the Prosecutor's Office were established under the Constitution to meet the State's obligation to carry out state constitutional competencies. Decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court are “final and binding” and need to be fully respected. In addition, parties generally supported the establishment of these judicial institutions, with a few exceptions.

That some propose to weaken institutions which have a key role to play in the fight against corruption is deplorable, especially when there is a clear demand from citizens and the International Community to stop corruption in BiH.

The question we keep asking and are sure the citizens of this country are asking themselves, regardless of which part of the country they live in and which political party they vote for, is the right one: "Why would a politician want to weaken an institution, in this case at the State level, that has a key role to play in the fight against corruption? Why would a politician possibly want to weaken institutions that have an important role to play in convicting corrupt officials?" Whether you are from the International Community or you are a citizen of this country, you want the same thing, institutions that are being strengthened, not weakened, to convict corrupt officials.

Dnevni list: Dodik wishes to "abolish" you (meaning your function and OHR mission). Your comment? You are sometimes criticized that you are too soft towards his rhetoric? Perhaps you are just being good-mannered? Or the PIC is not unanimous when it comes to the "tactics" towards Dodik? It is a fact that Russia and Serbia often stand by him.

Valentin Inzko: My mandate is clearly set out in the Peace Agreement and I can assure the citizens of BiH that the International Community remains as committed to the Peace Agreement as it ever did. Closure of the OHR will be decided by the International Community and not by President Dodik or any other domestic politician. What I can tell you is that those are precisely the actions and rhetoric we have seen from President Dodik over the last nine years that are responsible for the continued presence of the OHR.

So, OHR closure? One day yes, but before that we are going to have to see the established conditions met and of course an end to the direct challenges to the Peace Agreement of the kind that we are seeing most recently with the proposed referendum.

Dnevni list: Let's talk a little about the current Chairman of the State Presidency, Dragan Čović. I am interested in your opinion, where in Europe can the president speak openly about whom he should remove or appoint to lead positions in state companies? Is that what a state president does? There is loud talk about the road to Europe, while on the ground they are working on "acquiring" financial centres (public companies). Is this transparent policy?

Valentin Inzko: Progress will be achieved when appointments have more to do with merit, and less to do with political affiliation and the principle of party control over appointed individuals. We are clearly not there yet.

Dnevni list: What would happen, for instance, if the president of your country constantly said things like: "We will put this person as the head of 'Elektroprivreda', and that person to lead 'Telecom'..."

Valentin Inzko: The public opinion would exert enormous pressure on the political establishment to end such behaviour. There would almost certainly be a debate whether it is in the public interest to have public enterprises that serve as cash cows and employment bureaus for political parties, or whether it would be better to privatize such companies. This is the debate which should be happening here.

Dnevni list: Nicholas Hill said recently that the only economic priority the HDZ BiH focused on after the election was the appointment of party personnel in governing boards of profitable state companies. Do you agree with this?

Valentin Inzko: As long as appointments are viewed as "spoils of war" after the elections the situation will not change. Divide up the posts between parties and then we all appoint each other's candidates. Isn't this what we basically have at the moment? As I keep on saying, there is a fundamental change in the approach to politics that is required where the interests of citizens and the principle of functionality is put before party political control. This is inevitable. I cannot say if it will come gradually or suddenly, but it will come.

Dnevni list: Mr. Hill also commented recently that the SDA, under the leadership of Bakir Izetbegović, could show more commitment towards a multi-ethnic state in a much more concrete way. Do you agree with this? Is the SDA too much unitarian, as some analysts like to say?

Valentin Inzko: Let me be very frank. Just like every other party, the SDA needs to look long and hard at itself

and the results of its rule in those areas where it has won elections over the last twenty years. Are these cities, towns and villages sufficiently multi-ethnic in 2015? I don't think so. Are they all economically successful? Has the youth stayed, or have they left cities and villages to go abroad?

If they are true to the vision then we are going to have to hear in very concrete terms what measures they will implement to increase multi-ethnicity in those communities where they have held the majority. If you are genuinely for multi-ethnicity then you need to do something to improve the results we have on the ground. Everything else represents nice words and empty promises. This is my challenge to the SDA and every other major party in BiH, show us the concrete measures you will take to increase levels of multi-ethnicity in local communities where you govern.

What the International Community does not want to hear from any party is what we have all too often heard in the past, and that is how somebody else is to blame. No more excuses, no more blaming, all we want to hear now is concrete proposals and then we want to see concrete results.

As a final word on this issue, let me stress the role that the country's bigger urban areas have to play in rebuilding the multi-ethnic fabric of this country. Sarajevo as the capital city has a particular responsibility in this respect and it will need to set a positive example by taking steps that will significantly increase its multi-ethnicity in the years to come.

Dnevni list: Can you assess the work of the FBiH Government and the Council of Ministers so far? A new coalition in the FBiH has been announced, but it appears to be quite uncertain, and a couple of days ago Čović also announced a reshuffling of the Council of Ministers and continuation of the reshuffling of the FBiH Government. As we can see, not a year has passed since the elections, and the governments are just dealing with reconstruction like some "construction workers"?

Valentin Inzko: Both have shown clear signs that they have serious intentions, but in both cases we need to see the pace of reform being accelerated after the summer recess. I think both the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the FBiH Prime Minister would agree with this. More reshuffles and changes? Really? Is that what we need? I thought the idea was we finally saw an accelerated delivery of reforms to kick start the economy and to create much needed jobs.

If I had a dollar for every time a politician promised that something was going to be done in the next ten days or two weeks I would be richer than Rockefeller. It is time to stop talking and to start delivering concrete results.

Dnevni list: Can you comment on the behaviour of the opposition at the FBiH level and the announcement of the unification of the leftist parties before the next elections?

Valentin Inzko: Let me just say that one of the greatest failures of social democrats in this country is the fact that after twenty years they remain divided and that we still do not have a single social democratic party or movement in this country.

Dnevni list: The Council of Ministers has recently appointed Dragan Čović's son-in-law as the acting Director of BHANSA, while the same agency also employs the son-in-law's brother. His other son-in-law's brother allegedly works as an advisor in Čović's cabinet at the Presidency. During Nermin Nikšić's term as the Prime Minister, his brother was appointed acting Director of "Autoceste FBiH". In the past, the RS President Milorad Dodik placed his best man Ranko Škrbić first as the Head of the Entity Health Ministry, and then as BiH's Ambassador to Serbia. During Željka Cvijanović's term as the RS Minister for Economic Relations and Regional Cooperation, her office employed Milorad Dodik's daughter. One of the more bizarre examples involves former Serb member of the BiH Presidency Nebojša Radmanović. Namely, his son-in-law Danilo was the chief advisor in the office of Radmanović, his father-in-law. While NSRzB was in the FBiH Government, Ivan Šakota, son-in-law of Slavo Lijanović, former Agriculture Minister Jerko Lijanović's brother, was first appointed as Head of the FBiH Development Bank Supervisory Board, and afterwards one of the directors of "Autoceste FBiH"... The Chairman of the Council of Ministers Denis Zvizdić hired a cousin as his advisor. Please tell me, are these examples of nepotism, political corruption or lack of morals? I have listed only a few high-level examples...

Valentin Inzko: Nepotism is a sickness that is eating away at this country. What worries me most is that, like

other corrupt practices, it seems to have become acceptable and normal instead of being shameful. In other countries this simply could not happen because politicians know that it is politically and morally completely unacceptable. There must be basic standards in public life. This is one of those issues where the public should be protesting more vigorously.

Dnevni list: So, on the one hand, we have the European “fairy-tales” told by the BiH leaders; while in the background they work on securing jobs for their relatives, party colleagues and friends. How can trust these people to deliver a better future for BiH?

Politicians must be judged and held to account on the basis of their actions and results, both positive and negative. As I said, a renewed engagement from inside the country is required to do this. A partnership between the media and the public to tackle specific problems has a huge potential to change things.

Dnevni list: Mr. Wigemark stated recently: “Days of privileges with ‘jobs for our people’ in exchange for political favours must, and, I believe, can come to an end.” I have already mentioned examples that prove Mr. Wigemark wrong. Is the EU blind? Or are they simply tacitly approving the nepotistic behavior shown by the strongest political figures in the country?

Valentin Inzko: I fully agree with Mr. Wigemark. You have to work on issues to improve things. There is no switch that can be pressed to deliver much needed changes in an instant. Remember what Kennedy said: “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country”. Don’t wait for things to magically be changed by someone else, get involved. Pressure decision-makers for change. Everyone should start changes with him or herself.

Dnevni List: A new Labour Law could add fuel to fire in autumn. The trade unions are announcing mass demonstrations and revenge. Do you have something to tell them in that regard?

The failure to reform over the last nine years has led us to a point where the reforms will probably be more painful than would otherwise have been the case. The sole blame for this lies with those who were in power since 2006. They have brought the country to this point, while they become ever wealthier. The hard truth is that we cannot go on like this.

My plea is that there is dialogue, and that the country pulls together to get through some challenging times and emerges in a better place. I absolutely believe the country has the strength to progress if it pulls together. This is why I always stress the importance not of centralization, this is not what the country needs, but instead of re-integration – political, economic and social, the country working as one. And, of course, functionality. That is very important.

Dnevni list: With regards to the new Labour Law, the authorities are saying: “there will be more jobs,” but they are constantly being proven wrong by economic experts, while workers are fearfully waiting to see what happens.

Valentin Inzko: The clear interest of the people is to get the economy going, to open up new jobs, and to move ahead on the Euro-Atlantic path. Political representatives owe this to the citizens since they have failed to deliver meaningful progress over the last nine years. The International Community is ready to support this Reform Agenda. Our common vision remains a re-integrated, functional and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina, a state which works in the interests of its citizens and is a fully integrated member of European family.

Dnevni list: BiH is facing a mass exodus, not only of Croats, but also of Serbs and Bosniaks, and others. Practically, whoever has an opportunity to leave and try to pursue happiness somewhere else abroad, does so. What do you think about that?

Valentin Inzko: This is the very practical consequence of the last nine years of failing to reform. It is a tragedy that politicians are finally waking up to. Now we will see if they care enough to deliver concrete results that will tackle this frightening trend. If we can create new jobs in the private sector we have a fighting chance of keeping young people here. However, if we really want to keep them here then we must create the atmosphere of tolerance and harmony instead of this constant bickering that is fuelled by politicians whose modus operandi is to stir inter-ethnic tensions so they can appear as protectors of their people. This also needs to change and I am sure that it will in time.

Dnevni list: Is it morally acceptable for MPs to spend the whole month of August on holiday? There will be no collective leave in neighbouring countries.

Valentin Inzko: Politicians need a break just like every other person. The problem is not the summer recess. The problem is when results are not being delivered during the remained of the year. This is what needs to be fixed.

Dnevni list: What do you think about the so called “white bread” phenomenon?

Valentin Inzko: At a time when there is such widespread poverty in the country, these payments should be terminated.

Dnevni list: Do you have any positive messages for the BiH citizens?

Valentin Inzko: Yes I do. Exactly 50 years ago Singapore became a state. Before, it was a swamp, not much bigger than Una-Sana Canton. They also have three peoples. But they had a vision, and a will to work hard to succeed. BiH can also succeed. You have a beautiful and very special country. Reach out to each other, roll up your sleeves and help to get this country back to work and moving forwards. As you do this, demand that your politicians work just as hard. Hold your politicians to account and progress can be made during the next few years. With your involvement things can get better.