

Večernji list: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



By: Jozo Pavković

Večernji list: How do you comment recent development related to the arrest of SBB leader Fahrudin Rdoncic and what is your assessment what could be the consequences for the political climate in BiH? Also what should be the next steps?

Valentin Inzko: As you know I never comment on ongoing judicial proceedings. In general, what I always say is that, firstly, I expect everyone to refrain from putting undue pressure on judicial institutions and allow them to do their job, and secondly I expect that all relevant authorities act with highest standards of professionalism, equity, and accountability.

Večernji list: How do you comment on BiH's intention to submit an application for EU membership and what will this mean for BiH's European and reform road?

Valentin Inzko: An EU membership application is always a positive development for a country and its citizens. I would argue it is especially important for BiH. This country desperately needs deep and systematic changes in the interest of the people, which the EU integration process will inevitably trigger. A committed focus on the Reform Agenda is already in the service of that aim. Considering the circumstances, I welcome the handing over of the application.

The 15th of February should be positively remembered.

Večernji list: It is somewhat surprising – and for me shocking – that the information on the date of submission of the application was met with negative reactions by some parties and media. How do you look at that?

Valentin Inzko: I can understand to a certain extent concerns that there needs to be sufficient meaningful progress to make the application credible. And that should indeed be the focus. The Netherlands presidency and High Representative Mogherini gave a date, which is clearly a good sign. It is now up to BiH to prepare a credible application. There is no time or energy to waste. Implementation should start immediately and officials should work around the clock.

Večernji list: A new chance for BiH is the NATO Summit in Warsaw. How realistic is it to expect an activation of MAP in this meeting?

Valentin Inzko: The NATO Summit in Warsaw is more of a question for others to answer, since it is not my mandate. On my part, I can welcome the fact that the registration of perspective defence property seems to be moving along, though we need more progress for those properties located in the RS. Legally speaking, there is no impediment whatsoever to register perspective defense property under the applicable legislation, primarily under the BiH Law on Defense and the relevant decisions of the BiH Presidency, and in line with the Decision of the BiH Constitutional Court.

It should also be noted that the decision to send Bosnia and Herzegovina's formal application for NATO MAP was taken unanimously by the BiH Presidency in 2010 and therefore I would like to join recent optimism expressed by the BiH Presidency Chairman Covic that MAP activation should take place as soon as possible.

Večernji list: Internally, much is expected from the announced changes of the Election Law. In this process, the Croats wish to remove a possibility of negating an electoral will of a whole people?

Valentin Inzko: As we saw before, this and related issues can burden the domestic political scene to the extent that they take all of the oxygen out of important reform processes. We need a sincere approach which can bring results and if I can do anything to help, I am certainly ready to do so.

More importantly, as media reports suggest, this is something that domestic stakeholders are talking about and working on. I wholeheartedly encourage them to try to find a satisfactory solution for all citizens through dialogue. In case of success that would be a win-win situation for all in BiH.

At the same time, I have to say that in addition to big political questions like the one you mentioned, there are also several more technical changes to the BiH Election Law on the table, which have been recommended by international and domestic observers. These changes are focused on things like making the process less prone to fraud, dealing with campaign financing and addressing anti-corruption standards. These are changes which would benefit all honest people, and I expect the parties represented in the working group on the Election Law to ensure that these changes are not held hostage by the desire to address bigger political issues. On this there is a high-level of agreement in the international community.

Večernji list: What is your view of a possible postponement of local elections, or joining them to the general elections?

Valentin Inzko: There are certainly reasons to argue for having elections closer together. Having a longer period of time during which no one is actively campaigning could give political actors more space for work and more time to focus on reforms. That said, it will be up to the working group and the

parties represented in parliament to decide whether there is the necessary support to make such a change a reality.

Večernji list: Do you believe a referendum on state judiciary will be held in the RS and can concrete results within the structural dialog prevent its implementation?

Valentin Inzko: My position is very clear and consistent. In my September 2015 Special Report to the UN Security Council in my capacity as the final authority regarding the interpretation of the GFAP, I determined the referendum to be clear breach of the GFAP, in particular of Annexes 4 and 10. The PIC SB unequivocally declared that the announced referendum in the Republika Srpska would represent a fundamental violation of the GFAP, and challenge the cohesion, sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH.

Matters of state judicial institutions fall within the constitutional responsibilities of the state and do not fall under the entity's constitutional responsibilities, while the status and powers of the High Representative are matters arising under the GFAP and international law, and therefore do not fall within the purview of the entities.

Please bear in mind that all 28 foreign ministers of the EU, the vast majority of the UN Security Council, Serbian Prime Minister Vucic and President Nikolic, have expressed opposition to the referendum. Shall we conclude that they are all wrong and RS authorities are right?

My clear advice to RS authorities, which I take this opportunity to repeat, is to put the referendum aside and to fully respect and work within the framework of the Peace Agreement.

Večernji list: You have not been using your Bonn Powers for a long time now. Have you deliberately shifted the responsibility on the local politicians and judiciary – so

that they must agree on everything themselves?

Valentin Inzko: The role of the OHR has evolved over the years and this was always the plan, to take Bosnia and Herzegovina to the point where it would no longer be necessary to have a High Representative. This is still the plan, but we are not there yet. It is BiH who wants to become a member of EU and not OHR and International Community. Therefore, if BiH wants to move towards Brussels, it will have to move from expressing verbal readiness towards concrete action. Tricks will not cut it.

Although I support the principle “more Brussels, less Dayton”, we are all clear that Dayton is still here and that is a reality. It includes the Constitution. The decision on OHR closure will be made at the level of the PIC, and for me that will be a happy day, when we can say that BiH is irreversibly on the Euro-Atlantic road, as a single, stable, functional but decentralised state.

Meanwhile my Office will continue to facilitate progress, but we will not go back to an approach where the OHR was driving and delivering progress when the authorities failed to do so. At the same time, if any party proceeds with threats that challenge the Peace Agreement then these will need to be dealt with. We are not going to have a rules-free environment where politicians trample over the Peace Agreement.

Večernji list: How realistic is a threat of radical Islamists connected with ISIL for security, in particular for stability of the region and internal relations in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: Terrorism is a global problem that all nations in Europe and beyond need to face head on. Problems persist. Nobody can say it will go away and let's not pretend it is not there. Concrete actions will have to be taken in agreement with international friends and partners of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Speaking about this I would particularly like to

welcome statements and initiatives launched by Reis Kavazovic and the Islamic Community of BiH. This deserves our full support.

Večernji list: How do you comment on the behavior of the neighbors (Serbia and Croatia) towards BiH? The Republic of Croatia formed a new government. How much can they help BiH on the EU road?

Valentin Inzko: Twenty years after Dayton, the regional dynamic is clearly moving in the right direction. Over the long term this will be increasingly important for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Zagreb and Belgrade have a vital role to play in encouraging and supporting steps that will enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to be the functional state it needs to be, in order to prosper and to meet the requirements for EU integration.

Croatia is already an EU member and a voice of support to BiH in the EU. This is very commendable and I would like this to continue. Croatia can serve as a good example of how progress is possible when there is resolve, determination and political will behind a single goal.

As for the new government I am glad that a pragmatic approach is taken and that a Croat from Canada with substantial economic experience was appointed. As one of the financial pillars of biggest pharmaceutical company for generic drugs in the world I am sure that Prime Minister Oreskovic knows budgeting, economy and how to run good finances. This is what is needed in BiH, a willingness for parties to find compromises to allow the country to move forward.

I wish PM Oreskovic a successful mandate. A prosperous and European Croatia can positively influence both political and economic processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.