

Večernji list: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



By Jozo Pavković

Večernji list: Do you expect BiH to get the “green light,” i.e. the questionnaire, at the EU Council meeting in Bratislava next month, thus making its next step towards EU membership?

Valentin Inzko: I sincerely hope that this will happen as soon as possible, once all of the preconditions have been met. But this is up to the leaders and institutions of this country, and the decision of course belongs to the member states of the EU. I have always advocated early candidacy status and membership as soon as BiH meets all conditions. This is important for BiH because it would trigger much needed changes. BiH needs to undergo many reforms if it is to keep up with rest of Europe, but more importantly to meet the many challenges BiH citizens face in their day-to-day lives. It is important to accelerate the delivery of reforms. We need results now. After years of slow progress, there is a clear need to urgently accelerate the reform process!

Večernji list: What is the greatest challenge currently faced by the BiH authorities when it comes to the EU path?

Valentin Inzko: BiH needs to generate a genuine degree of political will and consensus behind the accession process. BiH needs tangible results. BiH needs real, positive progress, not divisive, empty talk. Inflammatory and futile rhetoric – even

though some might try to explain it as pre-election language – cannot be justified because it is poisoning the atmosphere in BiH and making progress more difficult.

Moreover, the country's leaders need to face concrete reform with a sense of urgency. When the ruling coalition in the Federation announces with pride that they have agreed on which parties will control which public companies, while failing to reach progress on important issues like Mostar and the EU requirements, people rightfully lose faith in the political system.

Success on the EU path will require not just reforms that transform the economy and society of BiH for the better, it will require a change in politics, a change which says, “stop spending all your energy on divisive rhetoric, stop spending all your energy on sharing the proceeds of power, start spending the greater part of your energy on serving the public that elected you.”

I'm not sure this message has sunk in yet.

BiH has clear benchmarks set by the EU. The coordination mechanism, the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, a meaningful progress on the reform agenda, and the publication of the census results stand out as important targets. I urge the parties to make a breakthrough in the coming days.

Večernji list: Cardinal Puljić says the global powers are beginning to deal with BiH. Do you agree with this assessment?

Valentin Inzko: BiH has been under the spotlight of international politics for a long time, but of course there are many priorities in the region and the world. In a certain sense there is a competition of crises. E.g. almost nobody speaks anymore about Abkhazia or the Crimea. Now the refugee crisis has taken center stage.

But the Cardinal is right. Since the German-British initiative, there is again a stronger focus on BiH. This of course could quickly change if a new crisis emerges. It means that time should be used wisely. Of course, it will be interesting to see what will happen with BiH in case of a presidential victory of Hillary Clinton. In a way, BiH is American heritage. I expect that they will start a deepened thinking together with their European partners. But obviously, there must also be a local contribution. For a tango you need two.

Večernji list: Can the publication of census results cause a new political crisis in BiH? Serb parties are united in rejecting the publication of results according to the present methodology?

Valentin Inzko: I somewhat understand the tensions, but these tensions will not solve anything. As I have said before, I believe that the BiH Statistics Agency Director, Velimir Jukic, acted fully within his mandate and in accordance with the law and international standards. And the International Community has given him full and untied support during last week's PIC. International advisors have been in Bosnia and Herzegovina some 25 times, and international standards have been observed. Finally, there is a very clear BiH Law on the Census, supported and adopted by all political factors and constituent peoples. I would also like to sharply reject those who claim that the census results must be based on consensus of all leaders. This is utterly wrong. The results must be based on law and nothing else. Also, the 1st of July deadline must be respected.

Večernji list: What does the population share of a particular people in BiH mean when it comes to the future, functioning and the decision-making process of this country?

Absolutely nothing! Anyone who thinks that pure numbers can be used as a set of political muscles, to turn things around in

terms of how the legal framework of BiH works, is sadly mistaken. That could only further complicate and jeopardise the internal relations. BiH needs constructive dialogue, trust and cooperation, and not numerical muscles.

BiH has its Constitution, a prescribed legal framework for decision-making, and procedures for how things ought to be changed. This has nothing to do with a head-count of any ethnic group. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to move beyond this kind of thinking quickly. All this political energy needs to be directed towards resolving real issues like corruption. Imagine if all this political energy was directed at fighting corruption. Why don't we try that?

Večernji list: Do you fear that the election campaign will further radicalize the political relations in the country?

Valentin Inzko: I am afraid that some effects can already be seen. At this point I will not mention names but there are some who obviously cannot resist the temptation to divert voters' attention from the real problems of the country by raising ethnic tensions. It is very sad to hear some of the statements as you would expect people to know better in 2016, especially with a clear EU perspective in sight.

I would remind you that the PIC Steering Board has clearly stated in its Communique issued after the Wednesday session that all political, social and religious leaders in BiH need to work on advancing reconciliation, mutual understanding and tolerance, and refrain from negative and divisive policies, actions and rhetoric. This will only divert energy from the urgent reforms needed to create economic opportunities and provide young people with hope for a future in BiH.

What I am particularly sensitive about, and I hope that such episodes will not be repeated, is the need for leaders on any side to stop praising or celebrating war criminals. This is totally unacceptable. Everyone says they want to join the EU,

but such behaviour is totally non-European. What this country needs is positive leadership and statesman-like behaviour. We could usefully do with a bit more of that.

Večernji list: Certain parties are calling upon you to use your powers and impose a solution for the elections in Mostar. Are you considering this option?

Valentin Inzko: In its decision, the Constitutional Court of BiH clearly tasked the Parliamentary Assembly, or in essence, the political parties and their leadership.

They need to sit down with their counterparts and work to find a solution. Do the politicians understand they owe it to the citizens? Not to me or to the international community, but to the citizens.

As for the international community, I can reaffirm our core principle that Mostar must remain a single, coherent, multi-ethnic unit of local self-government, with some level of local authority/administration below that of the city.

This principle was reflected in this week's PIC SB Communique, where the PIC SB called upon all parties, in particular SDA and HDZ BiH, to reach a compromise by the beginning of July to allow voters in Mostar to exercise their basic right to vote for the first time in eight years.

They are running out of time. They need to find a solution now. After so many years there can be no more excuses or empty promises. We expect results now. I repeat: I am not going to do their job for them. I want to be clear on this. But my office is ready to undertake a facilitation process if the majority of Mostar parties and the International Community would wish so.

Večernji list: Will BiH become the first European country without a public broadcasting service? In your opinion, what caused the current difficult situation in BHRT?

Valentin Inzko: I certainly hope not and I do not see how the politicians could justify this before the citizens. What they urgently need to do is to put in place a solution which ensures a single and simple method of funding across BiH for the entire PBS system and which secures PBS' financial sustainability and independence. What needs to be done is for the competent authorities to finally complete the implementation of the PBS law by establishing the PBS Corporation that will enable the process of digitalization to proceed.

Večernji list: What is the future of the OHR? Can you anticipate when the OHR will be closed?

Valentin Inzko: This is something for the PIC Steering Board to assess and decide upon. It is not up to me, and especially not up to the domestic politicians to debate. Sometimes I am truly amazed at the energy and creativity the politicians put into this subject. Only a part of that energy, if redirected towards the economy, would do miracles for citizens of BiH.

This is something that was not discussed at the PIC SB session held this week. And it has not been under discussion for quite some time. That should serve as a sufficient clue.

Regardless of the domestic political games, rhetoric or desires, the conditions for the closure of the OHR as set by the PIC SB in 2008 are still unchanged. The agenda called 5+2 is still there and it will not go away. If political parties sincerely want the OHR to be closed then the solution is in their hands, implement the 5+2 agenda and fully respect the Peace Agreement. It really is as simple as that. Personally I am ready to go home immediately if the situation would improve with my departure. But make your own assessment on this issue, please.