

Oslobođenje: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Vildana Selimbegović

Oslobođenje: The Peace Implementation Council (PIC) has reacted – uncharacteristically bluntly – to Thompson’s concert and has condemned the event supporting the Hague convicts. Since it was perfectly evident – even as the PIC was making its statement – that the concert would still take place, should we take the views of the PIC Political Directors as an unambiguous political message to the HDZ and to Dragan Čović?

Valentin Inzko: It is a message to all those who support indicted and convicted war criminals, no matter who they are. Some also had in mind the student dormitory in Pale named after Radovan Karadžić, the decoration of war criminals, or the school in Sarajevo named after Mustafa Busuladžić.

Such actions are not in line with European values. One cannot repeatedly claim to be upholding these values or even to be a champion of European values, and then not stand against the organisation of such a concert.

Oslobođenje: Mr. Čović is the one most vociferously insisting that there is no parliamentary majority at the state level, even though the HDZ BiH is doing the best it can to stop any laws in the FBiH submitted to the Parliament by the Government with a unanimous vote, i.e. together with ministers from the HDZ. Of course, there is no doubt that they are actually trying to force the amendments to the Election Law that suit the HNS. What I wish to know is whether the PIC has any views on its own about these proposals, particularly having in mind that HDZ BiH, as the one making them, equally insists that this issue is more important than the Sejdić-Finci ruling?

Valentin Inzko: The international community believes that the

European Court of Human Rights decisions need and must be implemented, and we said so in the PIC communique. The BiH authorities need to address the implementation of ECHR rulings, including Sejdić-Finci, Zornić, Pilav, and Slaku, as well as outstanding decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court, including the so-called Ljubić case. Although the Sejdić-Finci case is the oldest, all these issues are equally important and should be addressed without further delay. The international community expects all parties to engage in dialogue and find solutions on these pending issues in a way that does not lead to further divisions within the country.

And obviously we cannot forget Mostar. The PIC has once more underlined that the Constitutional Court's decision must be implemented in order to enable the holding of elections in this city. Our view on Mostar has not changed. It must remain a single, coherent, multi-ethnic local self-government unit, eventually with some level of local authority/administration below that of the city. The PIC has repeatedly called upon the political leaders to resolve this issue as a matter of urgency.

When it comes to the forthcoming general elections planned for 2018, the message is clear. The elections must take place as foreseen and elections results must be implemented smoothly. A scenario involving potential blockages and obstructions, as witnessed in the past, is not acceptable.

Oslobođenje: Your report to the UN General Assembly in New York has once more been rejected by Russia. It is no secret that the Russians want to see end to the OHR's mandate, regardless of the fact that you yourself have said many times that at least half of your salary is earned thanks to Milorad Dodik and his obstructions of BiH, as well as the EU path. Has there been a discussion about the status of the OHR?

Valentin Inzko: Let me reiterate that the conditions for the closing of the OHR, better known as the "5+2 agenda" as

adopted in February 2008, are still valid and unchanged.

The second condition is of particular relevance – “a positive assessment of the situation in BiH based on full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement.” You do not need clairvoyance to see that we are not even close to the completion of this condition.

Those who are demanding the closing of the OHR are generally the same people who by their actions extend my mandate.

Oslobođenje: Earlier this year, when the revision of the BiH-Serbia lawsuit was still in the headlines, the PIC emerged with a unanimous position which included Russia and excluded Turkey on one point – something never witnessed before – about the efforts to have Sakib Softić submit a motion to the International Court of Justice, although it later emerged that Softić had already for an entire year had a letter from the Hague confirming that he is not considered an agent of our country. Back then the PIC called upon the political leaders to refocus their attention to compromise, dialogue and consensus, but it is more than clear that the leading political leaders are not taking such calls seriously. How do you explain that?

Valentin Inzko: Unfortunately, the political leaders on all sides seem disproportionately focused on issues that divide the three constituent peoples rather than on issues of more importance to BiH citizens, such as creating jobs or improving the economy.

The decision-making mechanisms in this country require agreement among the country's elected representatives. The Reform Agenda, integration with the EU, rule of law, better infrastructure, a functioning judiciary, job creation – these are areas that all citizens agree are a priority.

So why don't elected politicians focus more on these issues? Citizens should ask their representatives these questions.

Ultimately, the failure to deliver results and fulfil the obligations politicians have made to their constituents should only lead to something even stronger than the Bonn powers – citizens' votes for change on Election Day. Using their pen and exercising their personal Bonn powers for a change.

Oslobodenje: The judiciary is a cancer of the BiH society and it appears that some substantial 'spring cleaning' is necessary, primarily in the BiH Prosecutor's Office, which still seems to be fairly inactive in the fight against corruption. Can the international community be of assistance in any way other than the structural dialogue, which is obviously bearing no fruit?

Valentin Inzko: BiH authorities need to ensure the proper functioning of institutions on all levels, including those responsible for upholding the rule of law. This is their permanent obligation, and international partners will remain vigilant in that respect.

There is a clear need to improve the work of the judiciary. At the same time, a clear distinction needs to be made between justified criticism and politically and personally motivated criticism designed to intimidate the judiciary and prevent it from doing its job, including prosecuting corruption.

With this in mind, there needs to be a clear push-back on all those who, intentionally and unjustifiably, criticize judicial institutions with the aim of discrediting or dismantling them.

Political leaders must realize that a society, including the economy, can thrive only when the rule of law is safely entrenched. And for this the international community is always willing to offer any kind of assistance that is needed. Personally, I like the idea that the EU has deployed international judges and prosecutors to Albania as observers. This is an excellent move for Albania. We could use this mechanism here as well.

Oslobođenje: The campaign for the next elections is now ongoing, while some analysts already claim that the 2018 Elections are going to be about making a real choice between the past and the future: what do you expect?

Valentin Inzko: We would like to see the BiH political parties using the time between today and the 2018 elections to deal with real issues that are important for the future of BiH and its citizens. First and foremost, they need to focus on reforms that will allow the elections to be conducted smoothly and the election results to be swiftly implemented. The International Community is clear: there must be no blockages of the 2018 elections or the formation of the authorities after the elections. We should aim at 30 days of election campaign and more 15 more months of work. Not the other way around. The mandate of politicians has not ended yet. As you know, Germans always score goals in the last 15 minutes. So let us use the remaining 15 months for accelerated work around the clock.