

EuroBlic: Interview with High Representative Valentin Inzko

By Nedeljka Breberina

Sometimes I feel like the criticism of my reports to the Security Council are written before my report is even published. I would encourage everyone to read my last report, which is available on the OHR web site. What you will find is that I have reported on problems throughout the country, and that I have had positive things to say about the authorities in both entities.

These are the words of High Representative Valentin Inzko. In an interview to EuroBlic, Inzko pointed out that the purpose of his reports is not to criticize or praise anyone.

"I have a mandate and an obligation to protect the Dayton Peace Agreement, which has brought peace and relative stability to this country for over two decades. When one or another authority takes steps which threaten to undermine that agreement I need to raise a warning, no matter who it is. It's not personal and it is not biased against individuals or entities," Inzko says.

EuroBlic: RS President Milorad Dodik has been saying lately that there will be no referendum on secession of the RS. How do you comment on this change of position?

Valentin Inzko: That is not everything he said. He has qualified his statements on a referendum, but still speaks of eventual independence. That said, I did remark in my Security Council report that such advocacy for secession has calmed down, at least for now. Let us look at the facts. The fact is that the referendum remains a part of his party's political platform. The fact is also that his party continues to discredit, block and obstruct the work of the state-level institutions. The fact is that he stood behind the organisation and implementation of the referendum, which contravened decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court. At the end of the day, he has faced sanctions by the USA because of his actions.

EuroBlic: The PIC SB convened last week. What are the most important conclusions of the PIC?

Valentin Inzko: First, we were able to agree on the Communique language without footnotes or dissenting views. The international community has spoken with one voice. The conclusions highlight certain priorities for authorities, calling on politicians to improve the overall political atmosphere in the country as well as to deliver on reforms. As a matter of utmost urgency, the country needs to meet the outstanding requirements under the IMF Extended Fund Facility and stay true to its commitments to the IMF. This will unlock international assistance aimed at maintaining fiscal stability and improving economic development. There was also clear and unanimous support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as full support for the mandate of the High Representative, and the importance of the implementation of the 5+2 agenda. There is also a clear appeal in the communique not to take actions that would undermine the state level institutions.

EuroBlic: There was a lot of discussion about the fate of the OHR?

Valentin Inzko: The so-called "5+2 Agenda", which sets the conditions for OHR's closure, has clearly not been implemented. At least two objectives on state and defence property have not been fulfilled and we have seen a rollback on other objectives once thought of as completed, like the judiciary. Also, the second condition - which in simple terms relates to a "positive assessment of the political situation" - is not close to being fulfilled. The conclusion is therefore that the OHR will remain open as a tool for the international community to deal with challenges in BiH.

EuroBlic: Can BiH be granted a candidate status with the High Representative in the country?

Valentin Inzko: Ultimately, this is not a decision for me to make, but a decision for the institutions of the European Union to make. In the meantime this is a completely hypothetical question, since authorities are not succeeding in meeting the commitments they have made toward the EU. In my opinion, however, I do not find these two elements incompatible. Allied forces stayed in Germany until unification, long after the country became part of the EU. And Cyprus is an EU member state where an international military presence still remains. I understand that some would like to use this argument in order to push for the closure of the OHR. But closure will

be decided by the Peace Implementation Council based only on the implementation of the 5+2 agenda, which remains incomplete.

EuroBlic: How (un)successful are the authorities in BiH in meeting the conditions for the OHR's closure?

Valentin Inzko: It is obvious that the 5+2 agenda has not been implemented and that the prescribed conditions have not been met. As I said earlier, at least two objectives on state and defence property have not been fulfilled. And the second condition – in simple terms a “stable political situation” – well, it is clear we are nowhere close to that. It is an interesting dilemma – do the people who are the most vocal about the closure of OHR really want to see OHR closed? Let me give you an example: defence property. The BiH Parliamentary Assembly adopted the Defence Law several years ago and with the support of SNSD, which provides the legal basis for a list of properties in both entities to be registered as the property of the BiH Armed Forces. Now the same party that approved this law is obstructing its implementation, refusing to register the limited number of properties located in the RS and thereby blocking one of the 5+2 objectives. This is just one example of how the same politicians who scream the loudest about the need for OHR to close do the least to complete the agenda that would allow for me to turn off the lights and close the door. In fact by their actions they actually extend my mandate.

EuroBlic: It is speculated that, because an agreement cannot be reached on the amendments to the Election Law, the 2018 general election in the country could be postponed. How bad would that scenario be for BiH?

Valentin Inzko: The International Community's position on this issue is clear. The 2018 elections must be conducted and the election results need to be implemented smoothly. Obstructions and blockades are not acceptable. We encourage the political parties to find solutions on all pending issues as soon as possible. There are still some months left.