

Oslobođenje: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Sanela Karaica

Oslobođenje: Two weeks ago party leaders from the RS went to Belgrade: after the meeting, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić spoke about peace and prosperity and BiH Presidency member Milorad Dodik, to say the least, maintained his radical positions. Reactions were inevitable, but what is missing is your view of the Belgrade summit: is Vučić interfering with the internal affairs of BiH by convening such meetings?

Valentin Inzko: I was pleased to hear the statement of President Vucic after the meeting. He highlighted the respect for the Dayton Peace Agreement and the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such statements are welcome and have a positive effect on the situation in BiH.

Oslobođenje: On the other hand, since Croatian President also has the habit of discussing BiH, many analysts see a parallel with the nineties: how do you see the situation in BiH, which does not have a government but does have election winners, whose ambitions are, also by your Office, described as anti-Dayton rhetoric. Where is BiH headed?

Valentin Inzko: BiH's declared foreign policy direction is membership in the European Union. Despite all the negative rhetoric in BiH, I think the country is still on the right path. That being said, there is a clear need to focus more on forward-looking agendas.

Oslobođenje: Your former colleague from the EU Mission to BiH, Mr. Wigemark, tried to form the government by blitzkrieg. The agreement was in place for a month; what remained after it were the threats of the SNSD leader that the RSNA would decide on abolishing state-level defence, tax and judicial institutions overnight because Zoran Tegeltija was not appointed prime minister designate of BiH Council of Ministers. What would be your response to that move?

Valentin Inzko: I will not speculate with regards to my actions, which largely depend on the moves by the BiH politicians. I would like to remind you of the statement by the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board, following those statements. The PIC SB called upon political leaders not to take actions that would undermine, weaken, or inhibit the proper functioning of state institutions. According to the PIC SB, entities and institutions must abide by the existing legislation and legally binding arrangements. Reforms such as the defense reform, the creation of a single HJPC at the state level, and the creation of state-level indirect tax authorities, were carried out with the full support of the entity and state-level parliaments. The PIC SB was clear that the BiH Constitution, the existing legislation, and the integrity of state-level institutions must be fully respected.

Oslobođenje: What do you personally think: will Dodik, as he threatens, “go all the way”? And where exactly is that?

Valentin Inzko: You should ask President Dodik. I, from my side, hope BiH will go all the way when it comes to the EU integration path. Of course, the path should be accelerated! The politicians should go all the way in reaching the necessary compromise and reforms, which would bring BiH closer to the EU. The International Community is ready to support and assist BiH on this path.

Oslobođenje: The European Commission gave clear tasks to BiH, and it is expected to define them more precisely soon. Can BiH respond to any of the set tasks without forming the government, and how can it form the government if the SNSD rejects the ANP while the other two members of the Presidency insist on complying with BiH legislation and commitments already assumed on the reform road?

Valentin Inzko: It is clear that the authorities at all levels need to be formed as soon as possible, taking into account BiH's international commitments. No doubt this is a precondition for reforms that are needed on the EU integration path.

Oslobođenje: Ordinary people in BiH are resigned and often say that everybody gave up on us. In the

first place that means the EU, not to say the international community which - like it or not - carries a part of responsibility for BiH. Is Russia's influence really so big that all other PIC members accept having their hands tied?

Valentin Inzko: Russia, as any other country, has its interests and positions when it comes to various issues in BiH. I will not discuss those positions, as that would be the job of the Russian Embassy.

From the perspective of the international community, I shall reiterate, the international community is here long term and is ready to help and assist BiH. That is it - to help and assist.

The engine that moves the train called BiH forward must be "Made in BiH." The era when the international community was prescribing solution, and sat in the driver's seat for the implementation of these solutions, is over. The politicians should come to terms with that, and start pushing forward. The sooner the better. There should not be any doubt that, when BiH moves forward in a more decisive manner, the international community will be there to help and assist. Maybe even more than in the past.

Oslobođenje: If BiH was to be viewed completely from outside, one could easily conclude that political threats are also used for the resolution of the Kosovo issue. However, the problem is even more complicated because there are even open threats of a new war, which, even with the most fortunate outcome, results in more people leaving the country. You often warn about that, but also about the need to implement reforms: how do we change the situation in the country, how do we fix the judiciary, fight corruption, when all we are dealing with are political declarations, which often serve to distract us from dealing with real life and resolving problems?

Valentin Inzko: Bosnia and Herzegovina is statistically amongst the poorest countries in Europe. It is clear that it needs reforms which will help improve the lives of its citizens. The EU integration process will provide BiH the necessary assistance in implementing the required reforms, in order to prepare the country to deal with challenges resulting from full EU membership. This is not an easy task. But - with the political will and support of the population - it can be done. But it is clear, that BiH needs some breath of fresh air.