

Vijesti.ba: Interview with Valentin Inzko

By Nevena Cosic

You have been at the post of High Representative for 10 years, can you give us an overview of your mandate, what to you deem to be your success, are there any disappointments?

When I came here 10 years ago, the International Community gave me a clear task, the so called 5 + 2 agenda, to close the Office of the High Representative as soon as possible. Accordingly, I had to ween local leaders off interventions of the OHR and that the International Community will do everything. This was partly a painful process, which led to many disappointments and frustrations on the side of ordinary citizens, but to be frank, frequently also on my side.

The greatest success is that the international community has remained unwavering in its commitment to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in achieving irreversible stability and functionality in line with the Dayton Peace Agreement. The fact that the High Representative with his mandate has remained in BiH is a reflection of this commitment as the international community wants to see more persuasive evidence from the country's leaders that they are ready to make the country's institutions functional, break with the divisions of the past, and move towards complete reintegration of the country.

I have also succeeded in maintaining the focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina with my biannual reports and appearances before the UN Security Council. An international body such as the Security Council deals with much larger, burning global issues and conflicts, from Afghanistan to Syria, Afrika and Venezuela. In such "competition" between global events and conflicts, it is very important to keep reminding the wider international community about the peace implementation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The UN Security Council has continuously expressed its support to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of BiH, including regular extensions of the very important EUFOR mandate. I also succeeded in raising the awareness of the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who ultimately visited Sarajevo and Srebrenica.

But on a more personal level, as a proud European, I must say that the happiest day of my mandate so far was the day the visa free regime with EU countries was granted to citizens of BiH in 2010. At that time, I was also the EU Special Representative. Another happy moment will come when I have the opportunity to close the OHR following full implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

One of the darker moments happened in December 2009, when the International community decided to send home international judges and prosecutors, partly, because it did not want to endanger the so called Butmir process of constitutional changes.

Regrettably, local ownership for combating crime and corruption has not materialized. To illustrate, on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, where the score indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 - highly corrupt, to 100- very clean, Bosnia and Herzegovina scored only 38 points in 2018. Netherlands, for instance scored 82. This shows that it is high time for this insidious challenge to be tackled.

The greatest disappointment is that Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders have not used the last ten years to implement fully the Dayton Peace Agreement, namely the 5 objectives and 2 conditions endorsed by the Peace Implementation Council, and thus create the grounds for the OHR to close. Indeed, as Head of the EU Delegation to BiH, Ambassador Wigemark, was quoted in Glas Sprske this month, BiH has to move out of international supervision if it is to be able to join the EU. Therefore, if they are serious in their rhetoric about leading BiH towards EU membership, the country's leaders must complete the full implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement as the first step.

After that, BiH, like every other country that aspires to join the EU, will have to do what is necessary within the EU guidelines to achieve that objective. An early implementation of the 5+2 Agenda would, accordingly, accelerate the closure of the OHR. In a nutshell, implementing 5 + 2 means enabling BiH and its citizens, to live just a

"normal" life in dignity. On the brighter side, the business community was very resilient and achieved, despite numerous obstacles, remarkable results.

- The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Courts in The Hague has sentenced, by its final verdict, former RS President Radovan Karadzic to life imprisonment. Some claim such verdict represents a strong argument to abolish the RS, while some claim that the decision will not affect the RS status in BiH. What is your interpretation?

The verdict confirms that Radovan Karadzic is individually responsible for committing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Individually, that means not Serbs as a people.

There is no connection between the Karadzic verdict, or any other past or future verdicts, and the status of Republika Srpska. Republika Srpska is a Dayton category, signed by international community representatives and regional leaders, including the Bosniacs. In my opinion, its status will not be changed by this verdict.

- The genocide in Srebrenica has been proven by many judgments issued in the Hague, including the final sentence in the Karadzic's case. Nevertheless, the RS government has established commissions responsible for investigating the war events in Srebrenica and Sarajevo. It has been announced that the commissions will start their operations at the end of March. Bearing in mind that the OHR previously condemned their establishment, will you react as before - by giving warnings, or will you possibly take some concrete steps with regard to the future results and conclusions of these commissions?

I am afraid that the real reason behind the establishment of these two commissions is an attempt to re-write history and to relativize confirmed crimes. Last December, the PIC Steering Board Political Directors, with the exception of Russia, deplored the RSNA Conclusions of August 14, 2018, which included the future establishment of these commissions. They also reaffirmed that the events in Srebrenica from 10 - 19 July 1995 had been conclusively qualified as genocide by international tribunals and national courts alike. Thus, in our view, it is pointless to still talk about this; there can be no further questioning of these verdicts and the facts which they have established about Srebrenica.

The ICTY was established by a unanimous vote of the highest international body, the UN Security Council. Not respecting the ICTY means disrespect towards this highest international body. Coming from Austria, I am glad that Nazi criminals from Austria have been sentenced, and quite a few even executed. This way a prosperous and morally clean future was enabled for my home country.

The truth about the events in the Srebrenica area is well documented and determined by international courts. These courts determined that the genocide was perpetrated in Srebrenica. Regardless of the fact that the original Sarajevo commission has never really started to function, which is a pity, the siege of Sarajevo and other atrocities in Sarajevo have also been well documented and have been the subject of various criminal court processes.

- The gathering of members of the Ravna Gora Chetnik Movement in Višegrad are usually strongly condemned by the public every year and there are claims that such gatherings pose a security threat. Can the OHR, in some way, exert pressure on the local governmental institutions to enact appropriate legal regulations prohibiting the gathering of this and similar movements, using the model of your own country Austria, which established the legal ban of fascist symbols, including the Ustasha-related insignia, and the Catholic Church in Austria even banned the service of a mass in Bleiburg?

My home country has confronted its past, and I believe it has done so successfully. We freed ourselves from this burden and were able to work towards the future by leaving the past behind - with due respect towards innocent victims.

It is unfortunate that BiH still does not have a state-level law covering these issues. The need for such legislation is glaring. The newly elected BiH authorities have the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the rule of law, good governance and European standards, but also to reconciliation efforts, and adopt the relevant legislation.

Allow me also to make an observation on European standards. Respecting European standards means, implementing them, otherwise this is just an empty phrase.

- What is your view on the government formation at the BiH level? Both Houses of the BiH Parliament have been established but the formation of the Council of Ministers of BiH is still pending. Judging by

the latest statements coming from the ruling political parties, it seems that BiH will not have its executive institutions even by the end of this month.

It is important that the process of formation of authorities is completed as soon as possible in the interest of all citizens, and that the newly established authorities, as a matter of urgency, focus on the necessary reforms.

- There are no new executive authorities at the FBiH level, and the establishment of the legislative institutions has not been completed in the Federation since the leadership of the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples of the FBiH Parliament is still incomplete. Although the OHR clearly stated that the 1991 Census is to be observed for the establishment of the House of Peoples of the BiH Federation, as required by the Federation Constitution, the instruction given by the CEC BiH, ordering the use of data from 2013 Census, was respected. How do you comment on the fact that the upper House of the Federation Parliament has not been established in accordance with the Constitution of the FBiH, and what will be consequences of this situation in the next four years?

A number of cases have been raised before competent courts about the formation of the Federation House of Peoples, including in relation to your question, and so it will be up to the courts to decide.

- Recently it was published that BiH has the largest number of people addicted to gambling in the region and the largest number of betting shops in Europe. What is your comment on that phenomenon?

According to some estimates, there are around 50,000 people in BiH who fall in the category of pathological gamblers. For a relatively small country such as BiH, this number is alarming. The abundance of betting shops is too great, and they can even be found in close proximity to schools. All this indicates a strong need for legislation that would regulate this area of business. Given the social problems created by the gambling industry, I would at least expect these businesses to be effectively taxed and regulated like in many other countries, but this is currently not the case.

Happiness cannot be found in betting shops. They are ruining families and the society as a whole. Happiness exists in countries like Finland and Denmark, in states with good governance, a functioning rule of law and a secure future. This is what the wonderful people of Bosnia Herzegovina wish and deserve. Nothing else – just a normal life.