

Nezavisne novine: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



By Dejan Šajinović

Nezavisne novine: Even though this does not fall under your mandate, I cannot begin the interview without asking for your comment on the case of children at the Pazarić Institut being restrained.

Valentin Inzko: The images from Pazaric are shocking, appalling and disturbing in many ways. It is incomprehensible that those amongst the most vulnerable, children with disabilities and complex needs, are being mistreated in such a way. The images we saw in the media indeed raise many questions, many of which should be addressed to relevant authorities and institutions. They must undertake an immediate and thorough criminal investigation as to what exactly is going on in Pazaric and make sure that proper follow up measures are taken and those responsible for such a situation held accountable. BiH signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009 and in 2010 ratified the Optional Protocol, which, among other things, enhances supervision mechanisms. Competent authorities and institutions in BiH must make sure that the rights of children and persons with disabilities are protected. I hope that general public too would not let this slide and demand answers from responsible authorities. I hope an urgent investigation will bring more clarity, but above all immediate improvements. Also, political games in this sad case should be avoided and

condemned.

Nezavisne novine: There were many reactions after the presentation of your report to the Security Council. What made the strongest impression on you of all the public reactions in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: In my reports I present factual state of the affairs during the relevant period. It is always quite intriguing that factual reports cause such a stir. If a person or a party undermines Dayton, challenges the state's integrity, undertakes any other counterproductive steps, I am bound to include that in my report. As always in the past, my report is only a reflection of statements made, like a mirror. I look forward to the situation in which my report looks like a checklist with positive answers next to every question. Until then, the reports will contain a full overview and highlight actions and decisions that are not in line with the DPA. As the ultimate authority in the theatre when it comes to the interpretation of the civilian part of the DPA, I am obliged to do that.

Nezavisne novine: Zoran Tegeltija might finally become the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, but the public is still wondering whether BiH is moving towards NATO. How do you view this issue?

Valentin Inzko: This indeed is a welcome and long-overdue development, which the country awaited for 13 months. Now, the formation of authorities is unblocked and politicians can start doing their real job and focus on reforms to improve the lives of citizens and lead the country forward. The answer about NATO is an easy one. Bosnia Hercegovina should implement its self-proclaimed foreign policy goals and should do everything in line with this and its legal obligations.

Nezavisne novine: Austria has a very close cooperation with NATO without being a member. How does that cooperation work in

practice?

Valentin Inzko: I want to be clear that I am the High Representative and do not represent Austria. But, clearly, as a former Austrian official, I know this issue. So, in 1955, the Austrian Parliament passed the Declaration of Neutrality declaring the country permanently neutral. Austria's relations with NATO are conducted through the Partnership for Peace framework, which Austria joined in 1995. That cooperation is very active. NATO and Austria cooperate in peacekeeping operations and also have practical cooperation in a wide range of other areas. One example is also the leading role of Austria in EUFOR. That being said, the overall political and historical context of Austria's neutrality is very different from BiH's. There are no parallels between Austria and BiH, and no parallels should be made. The course for BiH has been clearly set by the BiH Defense Law, the country's foreign affairs strategy and the decision of the BiH Presidency.

Nezavisne novine: Recently a debate was held on Reinhard Priebe's report on the situation in the judiciary. What do you expect of it, and is it possible that this time, like so many times before, it will boil down to a lot of ado without any concrete results?

Valentin Inzko: The rule of law is one of the issues of crucial importance for the future of this country. I have highlighted this in all my meetings in the US and at the UN as well. I even wrote a special report to the UN SC on the rule of law. It must have undivided attention, right now. If things do not quickly change, the number of people leaving this country will only increase, and that is one of the most serious problems BiH is facing. Since the elections last year, some 30 thousand people have left. For a country the size of BiH, that is an entire town. This trend must be stopped and reversed. The public has high expectations from Mr. Priebe's report and as soon as it is published, its recommendations should be studied and implemented. The key is implementation

and a sense of urgency. Just remember the non-implementation of “Sejdic & Finci” and other judgments. This is unacceptable.

Nezavisne novine: This year marks your 10th year as the High Representative. Do you see yourself in that role for the next ten years? Are you the last High Representative?

Valentin Inzko: I have been asked that question many times and I wish I could give you a straightforward answer. What needs to be done for the High Representative to close his office is well-known, and your politicians know that, too. If the country wants to decrease its reliance on international supervision, all objectives and conditions must be implemented in an accelerated way. Like the 5+2 agenda for the closure of OHR has to be implemented by politicians, not by the OHR. The person in the position of the High Representative at that time will be the last one.