



Euro Blic: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Slobodan Popadić

Euro Blic: What move will you make if the RSNA, within the deadline you stated, fails to revoke the decorations to Momčilo Krajišnik, Biljana Plavšić and Radovan Karadžić? There have been speculations in Banja Luka that you will remove someone?

Valentin Inzko: I set the end of April as the deadline having in mind the session of the UN Security Council which will take place early in May, at which I am supposed to present my report to the Council on the situation in the country.

There is still enough time for the RS political elite to do the right thing and remove the burden they have placed on the shoulders of the RS people by deciding, on their behalf, to decorate convicted war criminals. The RS National Assembly, as the institution that sent out the official invitations to the ceremony and awarded these decorations, now has the opportunity to show to the entire world what kind of RS it envisages: a modern entity that respects universal human values or an entity that wants to be recognised as a place that celebrates war criminals.

In my view, it is an easy choice and a simple one if you take into account what you want to leave to future generations.

Euro Blic: In the letter to the RSNA, among other things, you state that the withdrawal of the decorations would “remove collective responsibility from the Serb people.” How can a nation be collectively responsible for the moves of politicians? Are you aware of the weight of these words?

Valentin Inzko: The RS National Assembly is the highest legislative body of the entity. The people sitting there, deputies and the leadership, were elected by the people and represent the people. What they do in the RSNA, they do on behalf of the people.

Decorating convicted war criminals creates the impression of collective responsibility of the voters, not for the war crimes committed but for the glorification of war criminals. Once again, it is only about the glorification of war criminals on behalf of the people. I wish to make this distinction clear to all the commentators.

And I will repeat once again: there is no collective responsibility for the committed war crimes. The Hague Tribunal never tried entire peoples, but individuals.

Parliamentary decorations cannot change the legal facts established by the ICTY. The Serbs are a courageous and honourable people and I am sure they will find the right solution.

Euro Blic: Due to this, but also some earlier situations, the perception in Republika Srpska is that the High Representative is against RS and the Serb people. How do you view such attitudes, do you think that you should have done something to change that perception?

Valentin Inzko: As I said earlier, Serbs are courageous and honourable people. I worked in Belgrade in former Yugoslavia from 1982 to 1986. As a young attache for cultural affairs at the Austrian Embassy there, I met the most wonderful people, Serbs, like architect Branko Pešić, who, after architects Bogdan Nestorović and Aleksandar Deroko, built and finished the magnificent Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade.

It was Miodrag Đukić, another outstanding Serb patriot and later minister of Culture, and Branko Pešić who invited me to contribute to the church. I decided otherwise and, with their agreement, I contributed to a building where young Serbs would be educated. Accordingly, in 1986 I donated to the new Serb Orthodox Faculty. For this gesture, Patriarch German handed over to me personally a diploma of a "Ktitor." I must say, out of many decorations in my life, this one is very special and dear to me. This is just one example and I do not want to go on about what I have been doing for over 35 years. To praise oneself is distasteful.

To come back to your question, it is amazing to see how passionate some political leaders are when it comes to slandering the High Representatives and other international representatives, and how calm and disinterested they are when it comes to discussing the low level of the average salary and pensions or the fact that the best and brightest are leaving the country because they are sick and tired of divisions, rhetoric that brings back the dark imagery of war, lack of jobs, lack of justice, and so on. This is their doing, not the result of the actions of the High Representative who is in the country to oversee the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. And once more: there are no bad peoples.

Euro Blic: Will you remain the High Representative in BiH, i.e. is it true that there have been some complications in the election of Christian Schmidt as your successor? What was the role of the conclusions adopted by the RS National Assembly in that?

Valentin Inzko: The RS National Assembly plays no role in the process of the appointment of the High Representative. As for the appointment of my successor, I would advise that you speak with the members of the Peace Implementation Council. Or with Germany. This decision is up to them. It would be inappropriate of me to discuss it. Of course, I remain the High Representative until the decision on my successor is made and until his arrival.

Euro Blic: Why is it a problem to address the deputies of the National Assembly and to discuss open issues, of which clearly there are many?

Valentin Inzko: I was not invited to address the deputies of the RS National Assembly and discuss open issues. I learned from the media that they wanted me to submit a report on my work but they did not send an invitation letter.

But to clarify: I do not have a problem with addressing the RSNA.

However, I do not have an obligation to report to the RSNA.

I report to the UN Security Council on the progress made in the implementation of the Peace Agreement and my reports are available to all, through the UN system and on my office's web page.

But I have to emphasise that progress made in the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement depends on the work of local institutions rather than the work of the High Representative. Having that in mind, asking the High Representative to report on his work is not in line with the GFAP and seems to aim at shifting the blame for their inaction. In short, I report about the situation in the country, not about my work.

Euro Blic: How do you comment on Russia's position that the OHR should be closed and that the responsibility for the situation in BiH should be left to domestic politicians?

Valentin Inzko: The Russian Federation's stance is well known and there is nothing to comment on. If you ask for

my opinion, the conditions set for the closure of the OHR have not been met, and as long as that is the case, I believe the OHR should remain in the country. Germany had limited sovereignty for 45 years due to the presence of the Allied Forces, USA, UK, France and the Soviet Union; but despite this fact, Germans were the cofounders of the EU. In another EU member state, Cyprus, the United Nations troops, UNFICYP, have been present for some 56 years. In my own country, Austria, we had limited sovereignty for 10 years and I am grateful to the Allied Forces, as foreign presence can be beneficial. Not everything can be compared, but it offers to the readers a different perspective about the duration of the stay of the OHR.

Euro Blic: The Head of the Delegation of the European Union, Ambassador Sattler, also stated that it is necessary to reduce the role of the OHR in BiH, because it is incompatible with the European perspective of BiH. If we talk about the representatives of the international community, who has more of a say in BiH currently - you or the EU ambassador?

Valentin Inzko: As one of several members of the PIC Steering Board, the EU is of course entitled to its opinion. I have my own and I answered your question earlier. Germany had limited sovereignty for 45 years but was the cofounder of the EU. Therefore, membership and foreign presence are not incompatible. But let us be realistic. Bosnia Herzegovina is not even a candidate country, let alone a member state. At the same time, we agree in principle that BiH needs to graduate from international supervision. But it can not be done overnight. And graduation also means maturation.

Just take the Corona crisis as an example. Has the Council of Ministers done its job? Have the lives of citizens improved? Why are so many leaving Bosnia Herzegovina, above all young people?

The fact is that the 5+2 Agenda was established 13 years ago as the roadmap for the BiH authorities to reach that point, and they have done little to meet the requirements. On the contrary, we even see attempted rollbacks in some respects.

5+2, like the importance of respecting the rule of law, is fully compatible with the EU priorities and fulfilling it would bring the country closer to candidate status. That is our common goal. It is up to the country and its leaders to achieve that goal as soon as possible.

It is not a competition between the OHR and the EU, the OSCE, the UN or the Council of Europe on who has more to say. For me, being an ardent European, it is clear that Bosnia Herzegovina belongs geographically and civilisationally to Europe and ultimately to the European Union. At the same time, this is BH's self-declared goal.

We are all working towards this same goal. I just would like to have more speed. People cannot wait forever! The EU perspective must not be too far away! One issue is however clear, the Dayton mandate was given to the High Representative only.

Euro Blic: You have been in BiH for over ten years. What is your opinion about the key political leaders - Bakir Izetbegović, Milorad Dodik and Dragan Čović?

Valentin Inzko: Since Orthodox Easter is approaching, I will answer this question with a quotation from the Bible, by Holy Matthew: "You shall know them by their fruits".