START: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

START: You were an election observer in BiH – what places did you go to and what did you observe? Why is the observer mission so important?

Valentin Inzko: Yes, I visited a couple of polling stations on election day in Capljina. Generally speaking, the elections were conducted in a democratic environment. The incidents that have been reported should of course be investigated, in line with the established procedures.

Every election is important. It is my true belief that is one of the basic yet most powerful tools of democracy and I am sorry that many citizens did not exercise that right.

During my meetings over the last few months, and after talking many people from every walk of life, I got the feeling that these elections were especially important for many citizens. Many people told me that they want to see a new kind of politics after the elections, one in which the interests of the citizens come first. This is a view shared by the International Community.

The fact that this year we had so many observers, especially from local NGOs, supports this impression. More and more local people realize how important the election process is and I commend their dedication to ensure that the process passes smoothly and in accordance with the law. I hope that we will see an expansion of this effort in the future.

START: Some victories are tight and we can expect a number of complaints; do you have a recommendation for the CEC BiH or to be more specific – how can one control the CEC?

Valentin Inzko: We still do not have final figures, but it is

clear that the race is very tight in some cases and it is therefore crucially important that Central Election Commission continues to do its job in a professional manner. A situation in which the result is very tight requires a very accurate count of votes. I am confident that the CEC is fully aware of its responsibilities and equipped to handle the situation.

The tight races we have seen in a number of cases show how important each and every vote can be. It sends a clear message to all those who stayed at home on election Sunday and allowed others to decide on their behalf how important their vote is.

START: How do you comment on the election results? What surprised you the most?

Valentin Inzko: The citizens of BiH have expressed their will and I respect that, regardless of the final results and possible future coalitions that we could see. What is important is that the incoming authorities address the real life concerns of citizens, which they voiced during the election campaign and the protests last year and in February of this year. The time has come to deliver concrete change through reform.

I must confess that I am concerned about the fact that almost half of the electorate decided to stay home and not vote on 12 October. This is not a good sign, and political parties must do more in future elections to engage with the voters and make them take part in the elections. The best way to put citizen’s faith back into politics is for the incoming coalitions to deliver meaningful results. It is as simple as that.

I also welcome the declared intention of the BiH Central Election Commission to look into the large number of invalid votes and report on its findings.

START: How much were these results influenced by the engagement of the IC institutions, primarily the US Embassy, Japanese Embassy, and some others?

Valentin Inzko: Claims that the international community expressed support for a particular group of parties are simply not true. Candidates used such claims to distract attention from the real issues that should have been and the centre of the election campaign. It's always easy to attack or blame others instead of offering solutions to the real life problems faced by citizens. Did the International Community add its voice to those calling for citizens to vote and to encourage an issues based campaign. Yes it did and this was the right thing to do.

START: Are these the changes that the International Community in BiH wished to see?

Valentin Inzko: The change the international community wants to see does not depend on who wins how many seats. What we want to see is a fundamental change in the way that politics is conducted in this country. Whoever forms the incoming governments must start delivering on what they promised to their voters during the election campaign to address their real life problems. First and foremost we need to see a decisive effort to create jobs and real progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration. At all levels of government, the volume of work waiting to be done is enormous – for example steps must be taken without delay to address the continuing negative impact of the spring floods, to start repairing the country's neglected social and physical infrastructure and to tackle the scourges of unemployment, poverty and corruption. This is what citizens must bear in mind, and I hold those parties and officials who form the ruling coalition responsible for their promises. Citizens elected their representatives, but they can also replace at the next elections if they do no deliver concrete results. If politicians feel that voters will hold them accountable for their elections, they are more likely to get this country back to work and moving forward towards Euro-Atlantic integration. This is what the people want and this is what the international community expects. I want to be very

clear, the International Community has expectations from the incoming coalition – they must now finally deliver results.

START: What changes do you expect in the RS with the serious parliamentary presence of the Domovina Coalition?

Valentin Inzko: Let's wait and see what the final composition of the parliaments at all levels look like and not jump to any early conclusions or assessments. The first task for the winners of these elections is to engage in serious negotiations about the formation of governments, based on a clear work agenda for the next four years that the incoming coalitions are committed to delivering. Coalitions are not just about distributing posts, but first and foremost about delivering results that will benefit of all citizens. This is the litmus test.

START: What should be the priorities of the new government?

Valentin Inzko: The list of pending issues is very long, from getting the country back on the path of Euro-Atlantic reform path to addressing issues such an unemployment, nepotism and corruption. What I and the international community want to see in the next few months is concrete progress on strengthening the rule of law. This includes full respect for and implementation of Constitutional Court decisions be it in the case of Mostar or in respect of state property. In the Federation, we want to see concrete actions in respect of constitutional, institutional and administrative reform that would help reduce the cost of government and make it more efficient.

START: Does the OHR have any avenues of action against the politicians who violate Dayton and discredit the State of BiH or block decision-making processes at any level of government in BiH for any reason?

Valentin Inzko: The executive authorities of the High Representative remain in place. They are available should they

be needed, but this is not the objective. The objective is that we have authorities that fully respect the Peace Agreement, address the needs of citizens and work to take the country forward towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Provocative statements challenging the Peace Agreement are unhelpful and in the long run harmful those who use it. Everybody knows that the current constitutional structure can be changed only in line with the procedure foreseen by the BiH Constitution. There is no redrawing of maps. The objective is to get this country back to work and back on track for Euro-Atlantic integration.

START: Milorad Dodik said many times that it was important that Russia was protecting RS interests in the PIC, and the Russian ambassador to BiH said earlier that it was in Russian national interest for BiH not to join NATO. What sense does the PIC or the OHR make between these two facts?

Valentin Inzko: For many years, Russia has played a constructive role in the PIC Steering Board and I expect that we will continue to work together for the benefit of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens. As regards the aspirations of Bosnia and Herzegovina to join NATO, let me remind you that the BiH Presidency unanimously authorised the Foreign Ministry in 2007 to begin cooperation with NATO with the aim of full membership. The BiH Presidency, under the chairmanship of the Serb Presidency Member, formally applied for the Membership Action Plan in 2009. In the letter, the Chairman of the Presidency underlined BiH's eagerness to become a fully-fledged member of NATO. This was a decision of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its institutions, and we expect the country to fulfil its stated commitments in this respect.

START: RS Government officials have announced that right after the elections they would open the question of illegal engagement of the F BiH in their internal processes because the Federation Government secured funds for an alternative

space for classes in Bosnian for primary school children of a couple of schools in that entity. How can we resolve the question of the Bosnian Language in the RS?

Valentin Inzko: First of all, we have to see the new Government established. Secondly, it is a right of every child to get an education. We have voiced our disappointment that such little progress has been made across the country by the competent authorities at all levels to start delivering the positive changes that are necessary to ensure that that right is fully respected.

More should have been done before the start of the school year to resolve all outstanding issues. The fact that that the Conference of Ministers of Education has not yet developed durable long-term solutions in education does not absolve each and every competent Minister of his personal responsibility to act to ensure children's basic right to education is met in a manner that is non-discriminatory and inclusive.

The situation in Konjevic Polje and Vrbanjci illustrates the need to deal with these issues as a matter of urgency and I expect the new RS Government, once formed, will re-engage in a direct dialogue without any delay.

START: How do you see engagement of non-governmental organizations in BiH and do some of them, through their engagement, open the question of the purpose of existence of the NGO sector?

Valentin Inzko: The NGO sector is an important facet of every democratic society and this is also the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are all kinds of NGOs and it is true that some are more effective than others. Rather than perceiving civil society as a threat, governments should see it as a fundamental building block of a stable democracy that need to be nurtured, not over-regulated. Governments should be looking for opportunities to work in partnership with NGOs. Any

healthy democracy needs to be buttressed by a robust and active civil society. Civil society organisations are needed to vent grievances, promote dialogue and even carry out service delivery. They can be an effective arena, outside party politics, for policy debates to take place and for leaders to be held accountable. I for one fully support a growing role for the civil society and NGOs. What we need to do now is to pull together as a country. Working together and working hard, this country can offer its citizens a dignified life and a future where Bosnia and Herzegovina takes up its rightful place in European Union. This is a chance for a fresh start, a better future, let’s make sure we seize it with both hands.