

Jutarnji list: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Snježana Pavić

Jutarnji list: How do you see yesterday's events in Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica, Mostar, Bihać: is this a justified social unrest or impermissible hooligan violence?

Valentin Inzko: A clear line needs to be drawn between the one and the other. Both myself and other IC representatives clearly condemned the violence. On the other hand, a right to peaceful demonstrations is a basic democratic right and the people have a right to protest with dignity. Reasons for protests have been accumulating for years, but after the war, peace was precious to the people and many thought it was not yet the right time and they should be patient, etc.

I walked down Sarajevo streets this morning, passing by the Presidency of BiH, cantonal government building, which was still burning. People were saying, remembering those times, that they did not want to go to the streets in this way and they did not approve of violence. However, the causes were obvious for years, and they are social injustices, because there are more and more of those whose position is so difficult, while a minority are rich. People believe that some of these people did not acquire their wealth in a regular way and that there is work for the prosecutors. So, it is a combination of several things, social unrest and perhaps bad efficiency of cantonal authorities which came under attack.

Let me emphasize the specificity of the Goražde Canton, in which there are several large companies and all people work – people even come from Republika Srpska and Serbia to work there. There were protests there as well, but peacefully and with dignity. Among those who protested were also entrepreneurs, their women and children, because they were also disappointed with the inefficiency of the cantons and municipalities. And this is common to them all – the only difference being that protests were peaceful in Goražde while in other places, like Tuzla, there was a lot of violence. Tuzla was where it all began, and the situation came to a head: excessive use of force against the protesters and lack of dialogue and people from other cities began to show solidarity knowing that their situation was the same or similar. Only, Tuzla was prosperous before the war because it had mines and factories.

Jutarnji list: But, it was not ordinary, dissatisfied citizens that torched and demolished buildings, but football hooligans. Do you think that those who told the police not to react and to withdraw should be held accountable?

Valentin Inzko: I think the situation was very difficult. I told you that people still remembered the war when they were shot at, when they were killed, and perhaps they were afraid that the Tuzla case would be repeated when the police officers beat people up, which caused a wave of indignation. I think the police are not the proper address and they are the last place where accusations should be laid at this time. They refrained at the beginning...

Jutarnji list: But later, they decided to prevent setting fire to the Presidency of BiH and sent in special police forces, allowing the cantonal buildings in Tuzla, Zenica, Bihać and Mostar to burn down.

Valentin Inzko: Investigation will show whether somebody should be held accountable and I do not want to comment on that. The only thing I want to warn against is that it is understandable that people who have been through a war are afraid to use force. They mention as many as 60 injured police officers.

Jutarnji list: What do you think, do these protests have a party-political background? SDP President Zlatko Lagumdžija accused unnamed political forces that they had kidnapped the discontent in order to gain power. Which political forces would those be?

Valentin Inzko: I would not speculate on that. But in Sarajevo one finds out everything in two or three days. That's the kind of the city this is. If that was the case, we will know soon.

Jutarnji list: On Wednesday the European Parliament called for the abolition of cantons, and on Friday four cantonal buildings were on fire. Do you see a connection there?

Valentin Inzko: I see no connection, and I want to be explicit about that. Of course I am familiar with the problems of the Federation of BiH, which has 11 ministers of interior, numerous identical institutions and it is

difficult to coordinate their work, but the Resolution was the not the cause of the recent events. The proof is the fact that the parliament in Sarajevo already has „188 Recommendations for Reform of Federation Constitution“ in the procedure, prepared by an expert group which included Krešimir Zubak, Vehid Šehić, Kasim Trnka, Nadaždin Defterdarević, Mile Lasić and Zlatan Begić. That group was formed in mid May 2013, with the help of the US government, so that the local experts could develop proposals on how to make the Federation of BiH more efficient and less expensive. Those reforms, as far as I know, would not be at anybody's expense or detriment.

Jutarnji list: From Bihać to Tuzla and Mostar, the cantonal governments were the first to be attacked. The HDZ BiH assessed that that was a „classical coup against the Dayton and Washington institutions, aimed at the abolition of the Federation and cantons“.

Valentin Inzko: I do not see that connection, but I respect their opinion.

Jutarnji list: Is this a revolt in Bosnia-Herzegovina or a revolt of Bosniaks only, because there have been no unrests in the RS and mainly Croat areas?

Valentin Inzko: The situation in Republika Srpska is peaceful, that is true; there were around 300 protesters in Banja Luka. However, empty stomachs are empty stomachs, be they Serb or Bosniak, and there is a solidarity there. But, it is true, big protests took place in the centres in the Federation, like Zenica, Tuzla, Bihać and Sarajevo, and not in the RS.

Jutarnji list: In every crisis people feel a nostalgia about centralism and a firm hand, which would regulate this fast. Is this the case here too, does despair call for a unitary state and a firm hand as a solution?

Valentin Inzko: I think that there will be no centralism in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Some want a firm hand, but that is a thing of the past. Only the prosecutor's office and judiciary must be firm. Rule of law! BiH is a specific country, very decentralised, and I personally will not support centralism. But I want to support the functionality of institutions, state-level and all others, so that the institutions function well. And that is also the wish of the citizens, depending on whether they are cantons or municipalities, because there have also been many protests against mayors.

Jutarnji list: What would then be your specific proposal: abolishment of the Cantons or abolishment of the Municipalities?

Valentin Inzko: I would not speculate on this. As you are aware, we have some 150 Ministers in the Cantons. If all of them were good managers, it would be excellent. However, when there is no efficiency and no results, one has to wonder do we really need 11 Ministers of Interior in the Federation alone. All sensitive issues should be taken into account.

Jutarnji list: Yesterday evening all politicians commented on the protests and they all behaved as if they have nothing to do with the dissatisfaction demonstrated on the streets, with exception of those who resigned, such as the Prime Minister of the Tuzla Canton and the entire Government in Zenica.

Valentin Inzko: Maybe some people in Tuzla were glad that the Prime Minister from the SDP has resigned but I do not think there is a reason to laugh at someone's expense because every single person is accountable – bigger political parties have more accountability, smaller political parties less. However, in a certain sense, all are losers in this situation.

Jutarnji list: Yes, but there all acting as if citizens are criticizing someone else, there is no concept of political accountability at all.

Valentin Inzko: Yes, it is a part of political culture that has been developing for a number of years here. Things are still at the beginning in BiH. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina had to go through several transitions at the same time: from socialist to market-oriented economy, for single-party to multi-party system from a socialist republic to an independent state. In addition it had a transition from war to peace. When you have all this in mind, you can see that things have not been so bad: in some years the growth of GDP was 11%. It is therefore better to view things in Bosnia and Herzegovina in a short run and in a long run. You know how many talented people Bosnia and Herzegovina has: so many excellent artists, sportsmen, engineers and singers. These people should be given a

greater chance in the future.

Jutarnji list: You have been in Sarajevo for years now. How does this look to you? Are these unrests going to continue or the Friday events were the peak?

Valentin Inzko: I do not want to speculate. Speaking about the riots, I hope they had their peak on Friday. But, you see, we are all condemning this violence and nobody is supporting it. However, the causes remain and somebody has to address them because they have piled up. If the causes are removed then these protests are not going to happen again.