

Interview with High Representative Valentin Inzko

By: Almedin Šišić

At the beginning of the election campaign Valentin Inzko, the High Representative, called upon all political parties and leaders to refrain from hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric. In an interview for "Nezavisne", Inzko says that he expects all parties to fulfill their obligation to conduct free and fair elections. "On their way to the polling station, each voter should take a good look around. Think who has the best and most credible plan for developing your locality," said the High Representative.

Nezavisne novine: The election campaign starts today, what is your message for the political factors, individuals and parties, but also for the voters?

Valentin Inzko: For the daily life of citizens, local elections are in a certain way more important than the general ones, as they concern their immediate environment. Also, in many cases most citizens know candidates well enough to have a good basis for their decision on whom to vote for. On their way to the polling station, each voter should take a good look around: Are you satisfied with the where your area has developed and the services you receive from your local authorities?

Are the garbage containers full or regularly emptied? Was your tap running this morning when you woke up and wanted to wash your face? These are kind of things that your local leaders have to take care of. How BiH voted in the UN General Assembly has nothing to do with these issues. You should be more interested in whether the sewage treatment system is working.

Think who has the best and most credible plan for developing your locality. And most importantly, go to your polling station and vote; do not let others decide for you. As for politicians, my message to them would be to remember that these are local elections and to focus their campaigns on the needs of local communities and citizens.

Nezavisne novine: Do you believe in the promises of the political parties that the elections will be fair and correct, or like many others you are afraid that inflammatory rhetoric and high-level policy will prevail over the local topics and economy?

Valentin Inzko: We shall have to wait and see. I hope they will stick to their promise and campaign in a constructive and responsible manner. I would like to use this opportunity to call upon political parties and leaders to refrain from hate speech and inflammatory language or any other form of intolerance. People want to know what you will do to make their lives better and how they intend to move the country forward.

Nezavisne novine: In addition to having fallen into the deep recession, Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to be in the most complex political crisis since the war. What is the way to overcome huge political disagreements in the situation in which for almost two years since the general elections the executive power in Federation and parliamentary majority in the State have not be completely defined

Valentin Inzko: It is clear that some leaders are deliberately creating crisis to demonstrate that BiH is incapable of functioning, still others, who may not share this agenda are unable to move beyond narrow political interests and work for the interests of the whole of BiH. The result of this combination is catastrophic for the ordinary people of the country; reforms are blocked and BiH's path to EU and NATO integration process is on hold.

Nezavisne novine: Brussels expressed a new disappointment for not meeting the agreed deadline for implementation of the “Sejdić-Finci” decision. Do you believe that with the constellation of the current political relations in BiH it is possible to make any constitutional changes?

Valentin Inzko: Yes, with the political will to reach compromise, I do believe that the parties can find sufficient common ground to resolve most of the country’s outstanding issue and problems. The “Sejdic Finci” decision represents an obligation for Bosnia and Herzegovina vis-à-vis Strasbourg and an opportunity vis-à-vis Brussels. The real question is whether the elected leaders are ready to follow through on their declared commitment to EU integration. The opportunity is there for them to seize.

Nezavisne novine: How is it realistically possible to implement this decision and make each “party” in BiH satisfied?

Valentin Inzko: It is possible with compromise. How many other issues have been called “impossible” so far and a solution has been found in the end.

Nezavisne novine: It has been 17 years since the end of the war in BiH, and our country, as those from Brussels and Washington like to say, is inexorably on the European road. Do you think that because of that it is truly time to close OHR and have BIH. Officials take over responsibility for the country?

Valentin Inzko: I have to correct you slightly here: Brussels and Washington **want to see** BiH irreversibly on the road to the EU, but it is not there yet, I must say with regret. The fact that OHR is still here answers your question: if the international community thought it was time to close OHR, it would have done so. We went to see a decision to close OHR, but only when the goals and objectives set by the PIC in 2008

are implemented. Your politicians are responsible for that, they should say when they will implement their obligations.