

Interview with HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko



Dnevni list: Mr. Inzko, you have passed certain recommendations regarding the government in the Srednja Bosna Canton. Some media have published that what comes next is a kind of review and verification of the government in the Federation BiH. Is it true?

Valentin Inzko: No. The Federation Government is in place and is functioning. And you should remember that I announced that my decision to temporarily suspend the application of the Election Commission's ruling should remain in force until the FBiH Constitutional Court renders a final verdict. This could have happened much earlier but for the fact that Ms Kristo and Mr Bevanda, who had submitted requests for review to the court, decided to withdraw them. Let me remind you: this decision was made in order to allow the most competent institution, the FBiH Constitutional Court, which has exclusive jurisdiction over these issues, time to reach its decision. The international community as a whole, with the exception of Russia, felt this decision was needed. We did not take this action lightly, but the issue had to be resolved

Dnevni list: Do you put the legality of the Federal government in question?

Valentin Inzko: No. This government is legal and legitimate. I remain ready to respect the reading of the FBiH Constitutional Court on this matter, but until then I

consider this issue resolved. Let's not forget that it was some individuals within the HDZ block that put the situation outside the Law and the Constitution on 3 December by refusing to nominate delegates to the FBiH House of Peoples and that this situation went on for months. No system of Government can be held hostage to such obstruction, and this forced the International Community to ensure functioning institutions were in place, in line with the law and the constitution.

Dnevni list: How does, according to you, the current government in the Federation function? What are the good and what are the bad things?

Valentin Inzko: I have a good and correct working relationship with both Prime Minister Nermin Niksic and President Zivko Budimir and despite the problems they faced at the start of their mandate it is obvious to me that they are starting to get down to work and that they understand the challenges that the Federation faces and that changes are needed. There are many pressing issues that they have to deal with. For instance, I hope to see the quick appointment of judges, in line with HJPC requirements, to the FBiH Constitutional Court so that the VNI panel, which has been short of Croats for years, can finally be completed.

Dnevni list: It has been almost ten months after the elections and we still do not have the state government, the political leaders are far away from any agreement. How can we get out of this crisis? Do you have some recommendations that might be helpful?

Valentin Inzko: I can bet that not a single person has cast his or her vote in October just to watch politicians bickering and not producing any results. BiH political leaders must remember why they were elected in the first place and the sooner they realize this is not a theatre play and that the citizens' welfare depends upon them, the better. Narrow party political interest needs to be put aside in favour of the

public interest. Parties can identify common ground and then build on it.

The first step must be to form the State level Council of Ministers. The only way to tackle the current economic crisis and get the country back on the road to Europe is through effective and functional government; neither I, the EU or the International Community believe that we should be directly involved in this; it should be the will of your elected political leaders.

Dnevni list: A few months ago the international community tried to offer a compromise solution regarding the formation of the government, but the parties did not accept that? Who is, in your opinion, the main culprit for non-formation of the government and current crisis in the state?

Valentin Inzko: The biggest parties carry the greatest responsibility; it is as simple as that. They were elected to govern the State and, for the time being, they have not accomplished this.

Dnevni list: Our country is far behind its neighbours in terms of the European integration. Can we reach them and what are the things that the new government should do immediately in order to catch up with the region?

Valentin Inzko: That is true; the region is moving forward towards the EU; Croatia will become a member in 2013, Serbia will soon join Macedonia and Montenegro as countries with candidate Status. BiH citizens should be benefiting from the momentum of regional progress – instead they are forced to watch things get better for their neighbours while Bosnia and Herzegovina is lagging behind. So, not only has BiH lost five years, it is actually falling further and further behind the region. The EU's Progress report on BiH last year clearly said so.

If political leaders had said that they were not interested in

the EU and the economic, political and social benefits that being part of a region with 500 million inhabitants offers then this would be understandable. The fact is though that all these political parties campaigned on pro-European agenda at the elections, yet they still cannot even agree on a Government!

Dnevni list: There are frequent requests of the domestic politicians, first of all from RS, and lately also from two HDZs that OHR should be closed. What is your opinion? How long will BiH still need OHR and the High Representative if we know that starting from 1 September we shall also have the Special Representative of EU?

Valentin Inzko: I will hand over my EUSR mandate to Peter Sorensen on 31 August. Afterwards, I will remain focused on my mandate as High Representative—the mandate defined in the Dayton Peace Accords and reaffirmed on numerous occasions by the UN Security Council. That will not change; my team and I will focus on ensuring that the DPA is fully implemented and respected. I will also continue to work closely with the PIC, which brings together representatives not only of the EU, but of many other countries and international organizations.

Certainly, I have pushed for the EU to strengthen its presence in BiH and part of this is the appointment of a single EU representative. Peter and I will work together with one aim: to see BiH as a stable country, irreversibly on the road to EU membership. The OHR though is a part of Dayton Peace Agreement and will remain until the country's institutions are strong enough to resolve the problems the country faces. That moment will be determined by the Peace Implementation Council, no one else.

Dnevni list: Is it true that there is a disagreement between Europe and America with regard to the closure of OHR?

Valentin Inzko: Both Europe and the U.S. continue to support

the OHR and my mandate. Given the worsening political situation, the frequent attacks on the competencies of the State, its institutions, and even the Peace Agreement itself, there is a general view that the OHR must continue to function. Moreover the conditions laid out by the PIC SB for a discussion on OHR closure – the 5+2 agenda – have not yet been met. There has not been progress on State and Military property and the political situation in Brcko seems to be worsening rather than improving, for instance.

Dnevni list: What do you think about the people implementing the policy in the state being burdened with the criminal charges and court processes? Is it good for our country and is there such a practice anywhere in EU?

Valentin Inzko: The leaders of this country come to power through elections and the democratic process. What is most important is that no one can be above the law – regardless of his political affiliation, or position. In Croatia we are seeing that even the most powerful can be brought to account. This has come about as a result of having a strong and independent judiciary, a judiciary which upholds European standards. Would this have been possible in Croatia if EU values had not become Croatian values too? I think not. And as BiH moves down the EU road then ordinary people can expect that the influential few will not be able to continue to hold themselves above the law. BiH has started this |EU process and opened the Structural dialogue on the judiciary; this process now needs to continue.

Dnevni list: The structural dialogue regarding the judiciary reform has started, what can we expect from that?

Valentin Inzko: Let me emphasize my strong support for the dialogue. It may seem like a bureaucratic exercise now; filling in forms and so on, but in the long term it is not about completing questionnaires, but is a process which leads to a change in values and an understanding that certain

standards will be upheld.