



Interview with HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko

What do you expect from your visit to the USA?

I will be giving the UNSC my regular update on BiH and will have meetings with US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Countryman. I will lay out the extremely worrying situation in the country but also the positive fact that the IC as a whole is ready to respond to the challenges that are before us.

What will you tell your interlocutors in the US?

BiH is facing probably its worst political crisis since the end of the war, the culmination of a downward trend that started in 2006. The Dayton Agreement, which has brought the country peace and progress, is under attack by the RS authorities, as are parts of the fundamentals of the state. RS officials speak openly of state dissolution. Seven months after the elections, there is not even a prospect of getting a state government anytime soon. The state is still running on limited temporary financing, the legislative process is on hold so currently there is no prospect of progress on EU and NATO membership. All this clearly points to the need for the International Community to remain firmly engaged in the country, to prevent a deepening of the crisis that could destabilize the whole region and to assist in the return to the Euro-Atlantic Integration path. The IC has to keep the OHR and EUFOR with their executive mandates as important instruments: to neglect or give these up would be irresponsible.

In the last couple of days there are some threats aimed at you from Republika Srpska: media directly controlled by Milorad Dodik promise that the elected officials from this Entity will withdraw from the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina should you decide to use the mandate you have and defend the Dayton Agreement. Are you worried?

Firstly, I expect all elected or appointed officials to uphold the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement and to not boycott or call to boycott the state institutions of BiH. Secondly, I'm saddened that RS politicians don't seem to care about how this affects ordinary people in BiH. Challenges to the Dayton Peace Agreement are of serious concern to everyone, and the results are plain for all to see: Living standards throughout the country have fallen. Unemployment has gone up. Progress towards the European Union has been stopped in its tracks and is going backward.

Are you going to annul the Decision of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska to Call a Referendum at which citizens in this Entity would present their view regarding the need to have the BiH Court and Prosecutor's Office, and when are you going to do it?

I sincerely hope I will not have to act in this matter; the RS authorities have an ever smaller window of opportunity left to annul the referendum. But one thing is clear: This referendum is against Dayton and against the BiH Constitution. It has to be completely annulled. There is no other solution. This will be done by RS authorities, I hope. Otherwise I will have to do it. Nobody is denying the RS the right to hold a referendum on issues within its competence. But it cannot hold a referendum on a competence that belongs to the state. To make this unmistakably clear: The state of BiH has the right under Dayton to have a state judiciary, and the BiH Constitutional Court has upheld the constitutionality of the State Court. Also, the Peace Implementation Council, the Council of Europe and the European Union have firmly backed these institutions. If the RS has any issues to raise concerning state institutions, they can and should be brought on the agenda at the appropriate level, for example, in the BiH Parliament. Anything else amounts to the undermining of the constitution and the foundations of the state, and we will not allow this to happen. In regard to the powers and decisions of the OHR, these as well form an integral part of Dayton, are enshrined in the respective mandate by the UN Security Council and have been repeatedly confirmed in UN Security Council resolutions. Claiming that one wants to protect Dayton while attacking the OHR's Dayton authority is a blatant contradiction and goes against international law.

Do you have any explanation: why is the RS leadership using obstructions of this kind to steal time and stop the progress of BiH?

You will have to ask the RS authorities about their motives. But you are right: All these manoeuvres are distracting attention, time and energy from those issues that should really be on the agenda, because they are the real worries of BiH citizens – employment, education, health care, pensions or reconciliation, to name but a few. The country needs a Council of Ministers and a BiH Parliament soonest to take care of these concerns and get BiH back on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration.

What does it mean for BiH and the region? Can the neighbours - Croatia and Serbia -assist BiH and how?

Signatory parties to the Dayton Peace Agreement, including Serbia and Croatia, have obliged themselves to fully respect and promote the fulfilment of the commitments made in Annex 4 and in Annex 10 to the GFAP. I expect nothing less of them and am grateful for their support of Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Some time ago we had a very difficult situation in the Federation regarding formation of authorities and it ended thanks to your Office. Still, the HDZ BiH and HDZ 1990 expect you to come up with some sort of final decision since suspension of the CEC decisions was of temporary nature: is there a need and are you going to react?

For now, for the time being, the suspension remains in place. I look forward to the FBiH HoP being fully composed and working in the interests of the citizens. Also we need to see meaningful negotiations on formation of a State level government.

As of late decisions and positions coming from Brussels, including sanctions against those who breach Dayton, indicate that Europe slowly starts to understand and acknowledge its own share of blame for the current situation in BiH (I intentionally use euphemisms: it is about tolerating Milorad Dodik's actions for almost four years, which he used for various announcements and threats with referendums and secessions). How much support do you actually enjoy so that you may finally start to act, within your powers, to the benefit of BiH's progress towards the European Union and the NATO Alliance?

Faced with the current crisis, BiH clearly needs a unified and strong IC presence more than ever. The EU, the whole International Community, with the exception of Russia, are clear that the referendum and conclusions adopted by the RSNA on 13 April cannot be allowed to stand. Our response will be joined up. I have all the support I need to act in line with my mandate. I see that some media have been misled on just how seriously the IC and the EU take this issue; it would be unwise to underestimate our resolve to see the Dayton Peace Agreement upheld.

The OHR, as we already said, had to step in formation of the Federation authorities: when and how will BiH get the Council of Ministers, that is are you going to step in again?

I had to intervene as concerns the situation in the Federation to prevent legal and political uncertainty. Now, I expect those BiH politicians who have received the voters' trust and the respective mandates to start constructive negotiations on the formation of State authorities. They have no more excuses and no more time to lose. It is their responsibility, which no-one will take off their shoulders. And if they continue to ignore the voters' will and continue their bickering over posts, they certainly do not deserve citizens' trust again. These are the rules of democracy.