

Interview with HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko

With regard to your warnings that the elections are „a new chance“ and that the constitution of government is „a priority“, the political leaders in BiH „respond“ with their mutual disagreements, and as it seems now they seem to be closer to new blockades than to progress. What is your opinion about this?

No one in BiH wants a repeat of the last four years which is why it is important that BiH's leaders seize this chance for a fresh start. The formation of governments is a real opportunity to get the country back on track. BH leaders have a chance to show they are responsible to the electorate and to the country.

There is a clear need to accelerate and deepen the reform agenda. Voters went to the ballot box in October because they want the Peace Agreement implemented; they want progress on Euro-Atlantic integration and the country's debilitating economic and social problems tackled. A coalition that is based on substance can do this, and I strongly support all efforts that are being made to put in place a coalition that will deliver this in practice. As three months have passed after elections, speed in formation the new governments is important, but even more important is the profoundness of the coalition agreements and its future government programmes. The next four years will be decisive for Bosnia's NATO and EU accession steps. Because, what happens the next years will determine the life of Bosnians and Herzegovinians the next decades.

What is the international community at this moment expecting from Bosnia and Herzegovina?

All political parties and leaders have backed the EU accession process, all have said that they intend to fight corruption, strengthen the rule of law and get the economy back on its feet. This provides ample ground for agreement; and there is a window of opportunity now. BiH politicians need to seize it and the IC expects them to do so. The international community stands ready to assist in every way possible, but the essential decisions to move forward must come from within Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is what BiH's citizens and the international community expect. This country is their responsibility; they have to show to both, citizens and European Union that they are capable to take the country forward. The rest of the Balkan is making progress towards the EU and BiH cannot remain a black hole in the region.

The constitutional reform seems to be the most difficult issue in BiH, which also represents an obstacle in constituting the government. What kind of future do you foresee for BiH with respect to constitutional amendments?

As a matter of priority the country must put an end to discriminatory provisions against minority members in the BiH Constitution identified in the Human Rights Court verdict in the Sejdic and Finci v's BiH case. A year has passed since that judgement and nothing has been done about it. There is general agreement that this must be tackled and political leaders need now to make progress on this. It is also clear that the current system in BiH is too unwieldy and will prevent the country making real progress towards the EU. Changes that will make Government more functional and efficient, but that does NOT mean centralised, are necessary. However, these changes must respect BiH's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It must be – simply speaking – also much easier to progress in an accelerated way towards Bruxelles and the EU.

Will, like it has been already announced, the European Union starting from the next month reinforce its presence in BiH and in what sense, whether even by “imposing sanctions”?

I wholeheartedly welcome the EU plans for a reinforced presence and I support it in practice as EUSR. Europe is the only place where Bosnia belongs. The alternative would be stagnation and isolation. And it is EU membership that will provide BiH a long-term perspective of stability, prosperity and democracy, but it is too early to talk about specific measures as discussions are going on in Brussels and in EU capitals, and further talks have been

announced for January. What I can say, at this point, is that in the framework of the Lisbon Treaty the European Union will pool its respective missions together; in Bosnia and Herzegovina that concerns the EU Delegation, Police Mission and EUFOR for better efficiency and better impact. "Sanctions" or better, consequences, are normal if somebody does not comply with European standards. For example if someone does not cooperate with ICTY. But Europe prefers to work through the attraction of its system, with European values and with soft powers.

You have stated that BiH could access EU in 2020. Realization of that objective implies "many things", even closure of OHR, whose role is seen differently by the politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina!

People in BiH have a great saying, that one can never bake enough cookies to feed the entire village. OHR is not an obstacle for BiH's progress on its way to the EU. Everyone knows what is necessary for OHR to close, so it is really up to the local politicians. The PIC SB has called on BiH authorities to address the objectives and conditions in the 5 plus 2 agenda for OHR closure before any decision can be taken. And EU foreign ministers have done the same. So the broad trajectory is clear: First, the PIC SB will decide on the fulfilment of the 5plus2 agenda, and then the OHR will close. And until that day the OHR remains open with the full mandate, including the Bonn Powers. But the closure can not in itself be a goal. The goal is a functioning and prosperous Bosnia which can solve her own problems in an institutionalised way. And then comes the closure.

What is important is that the EU has given BiH a clear accession perspective and it will certainly always accompany and reward the fulfilment of requirements and any steps towards EU integration by BiH politicians. About the accession date, I repeated in some of my speeches that it took Spain nine years to become a member. So 2020 emerged. For me the most important phase for Bosnia will be the one, when Bosnia Herzegovina will become a candidate country during the next years and when the transformation process will start. This will be the period of "engagement". A crucial period, the most important period, when the whole country will witness tremendous changes, before "marriage". During this period also substantial funds will flow into the country. The membership will be then only the last logical point of the process.

Have, according to you, the Bonn Powers given the expected results?

To a great extent yes. Many things would have been impossible without the use of Bonn powers, especially in the first years after the war. They have been a useful tool, used to move the country forward in situations that were unsolvable in any other way. I also must say that, when it comes to Bonn powers, the premise of the International Community has shifted in a way that it wants to intervene less, a concept known as "local ownership". We want people of this country to stand on their own feet; we want domestic politicians to take the country forward, and to take responsibility for their country. However, I am still in full possession of the Bonn Powers and, if the need be, can use them according to my mandate anytime.

With regard to the statements from Sarajevo that Republika Srpska is "a cause of instability" and "an obstacle for the faster progress of BiH", the reaction from Banja Luka is that "RS is a better and economically more progressive and more stable part of BiH". Please, would you give your comment on this!

Neither is the FBiH the sole source of stability nor is the RS as developed as these statements would suggest. These statements represent the current zero sum politics that is being played out in BiH. The fact is that across BiH people want to see the same things; law and order, corruption being tackled, they want jobs and pensions and decent schools for their children. This political wrangling results in none of this. What I want to see is a healthy and more competition between the Entities, one which is positive and acceptable and will result in jobs, investment and a normal European life. It is true however that RS has a much simpler structure of governing, RS has less administrative cost than the Federation and based on statistic from RS they had last year an impressive industrial growth, based on results basically from the refinery Bosanski Brod, but not only. I am happy about any good news, be it from the RS or Herzegovina or any part of the country.

Republika Srpska is determined in its intention to mark the Inter-Entity Boundary Line, which you consider as an unacceptable move, i.e. “a unilateral measure”. How will you respond to this?

My view is that if this is to take place, it should be done in line with the Peace Agreement. According to the Dayton Peace Agreement the demarcation of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line is a military matter. The OHR is responsible for implementation and oversight for the civilian elements of the DPA. Annex 2 of the Dayton Peace Agreement provides a mechanism that the parties may use to determine the IEBL. This must be done with EUFOR and NATO. They are now in contact with the Entity authorities and are gathering information. However, let me reiterate that any unilateral action would be a very serious violation of Dayton.

Your assessment is that the situation in the region is “the best in the last 20 years”. How much did the policy of official Belgrade have influence on the improvement of the regional cooperation and reconciliation?

Yes, that is true. Belgrade and Zagreb, together with Ankara have had a lot to do with it. From Belgrade, who was first, we have heard some very important messages; the Parliament's Declaration on Srebrenica in March, and President Tadic's participation at the Srebrenica commemoration in July, along with a series of positive diplomatic initiatives have created a platform on which much better bilateral relations can now be built. And when I was in Belgrade earlier this month I urged the Serbian Government as well as President Tadic to take this process forward by further strengthening relations with the BiH Council of Ministers and the BiH Presidency. By the way, I wish president Tadic hitan oporavak after his operation. Dr. Silajdzic is a respected intellectual, but now we have a new situation also with president Bakir Izetbegovic. We should use this new momentum.

The fact is that both Serbia's president Tadic and Croatia's president Josipovic and Prime Minister Kosor have set their sights on the EU and this has led to a real rapprochement in their relations. The paradox is that BiH, which stands to gain most from this rapprochement, has thus far gained least. This must change and it is up to BiH politicians to change it. But the regional climate has never been more favourable the last 20 years. Bosnia's newly elected leaders must now take advantage of this improved regional environment and catch up with their neighbours. The international community and myself, we will assist them in this endeavour, but basically, it is their job and it is why they have been elected three months ago.