Interview with HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko

Visit of Catherine Ashton to BiH

The fact that the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy, Catherine Ashton, came to BiH so soon after taking office is a clear sign to everyone how highly Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks among the EU's priorities, and how interested the EU is in Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress. Baroness Ashton came with a very clear message: there can be no division of BiH – the EU wants to see BiH as a member only as a single country. Another clear message was that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the EU, but that this country must do its homework, and that the EU will be with BiH on that road and help the country.

The political leaders of BiH have to understand that the current blockade must be overcome because this country is lagging behind the other countries of the Western Balkans that aspire to become members of the EU. Bosnia and Herzegovina must return to the road of dialogue and compromise, which is the only one that leads to progress.

BiH is now at an important crossroads and this year it has a real chance to take steps towards the EU. I would not want to interfere with the election campaign that has evidently already started, but I have to stress that the general election that will be held in October of this year is of great significance for the European road of this country. In the next four years, which, in the long run, will be of key importance for Bosnia's path to the EU, BiH will need leaders that will place the interests of all citizens of this country before their own interests and have enough courage to make difficult decisions and reach compromises. Therefore I must send a message to the citizens to think really carefully and

deeply who they will give their votes to – their future depends on it directly. I wish the one who will be in power for the next four years to achieve greater progress on the road of BiH to the EU. Also, in their election campaign politicians should focus on real issues, such as the economy, the fight against corruption and organised crime, improving the school system and health care, and, of course, European integration. It is high time to put an end to nationalist rhetoric!

The visit of Baroness Ashton to Bosnia and Herzegovina is also important because now no one in this country can have any dilemma about the EU's aspiration – for an integrated and sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina on the road to the European Union.

PIC Steering Board session

In the forthcoming session of the PIC Steering Board we will not be in the position to say that the tasks that the PIC laid down – five objectives and two conditions – have been met. Progress has been minimal. In effect, it is the OHR that has achieved the greatest progress, because, due to the lack of political will among local actors to do so on their own, the OHR produced an inventory of state property and provided it to the local institutions. It is up to the Council of Ministers and the governments of the FBiH, RS and Brčko District to agree on the division of state property. They have not initiated that process yet.

It is tragic that I keep hearing statements by politicians saying they are ready to lead this country, that they don't need foreigners and want the OHR to close, but those same politicians are not doing anything to meet the requirements for the completion of the closure of the OHR and Brčko District supervision. The OHR is the only agency that is

working on meeting the requirements for its transition.

Judging from experience, I am not an optimist with regard to any early progress on these issues. In the last few days I have had meetings with all the leaders and I have not heard any positive proposals from them, nor have I noticed any softening of their positions.

In any case, OHR closure will not happen as long as the PIC's objectives and conditions have not been met. It seems that at the moment the OHR is the only one working on the closure actually happening. All those that have been very strident in their demands have not done anything concrete to make that happen, on the contrary.

So, besides the lack of progress on the 5+2 program, the PIC Steering Board will also consider the overall situation in the country. It remains to be seen what the conclusions will be.

Property inventory/apportionment

I have to remind you that a team engaged by the OHR made a property inventory on the basis of the Decision unanimously adopted by the Council of Ministers in September 2004, but also, I would not have started with the inventory at all had the working group tasked by the Council of Ministers done that!

The technical part of the work that should have been done by them was done by our team, in only a few months, which eloquently refutes the claim that this process required years.

Instead of concrete moves and talks that would lead to a solution of this issue, we have witnessed different, often shallow interpretations of the inventory produced by the OHR, even some blackmailing from some leaders. I absolutely disapprove of the arbitrary assessments of the work done by

the OHR team! The OHR did not collect the data that were used for the property inventory in fields and meadows, but in cadastral offices and land registries throughout the country! All the data were received from them, our teams visited them exclusively with the approval of both prime ministers, Mujezinović and Dodik, and such statements are a clear indication of the lack of trust in the institutions of the FBiH and RS and the people who work there.

There will be no imposition of solutions on state property: agreement must be reached by the BiH Council of Ministers and the governments of both Entities and Brčko District. That is their job now.

Speculation on a New High Representative

I do not have the luxury of having extra free time to get involved in speculation. I am doing my job and focusing on the implementation of priorities for the OHR/EUSR transition. I have the full support of the PIC members and the EU top leadership. And I have the explicit support of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

Reaction to Dodik's Attacks on Raffi Gregorian and Other OHR Staff

I have been speaking about it often but it is obvious that some things have to be repeated more frequently. This my Office and all the people working in this Office work for me. Spending time and energy on fabricating stories and conspiracy theories on the existence of some lobbies, parallel and old structures within OHR, as well as mercenary press statements is a complete waste of time, and, to be honest, it is a little bit offensive altogether as it is an insult to the

intelligence.

Is there somebody out there who really thinks I am paying attention to all that and that it has some effect? Everyone working for me enjoys my full support and I am aware of everything that is being done, as it is being done with my approval. These people are professionals and colleagues I respect highly. Public attacks on people on the basis of fabricated stories and the practice of auctioning off names in order to threaten somebody, with the intention of making that person stop doing his job in a conscientious manner, reminds me of past times and the methods employed by the state services during those times. I will repeat, we should not engage into this useless business but should focus on reforms required to bring this country forward on the path of Euro-Atlantic integration.

How do you comment the use of language of hatred and fascist vocabulary in the media?

It is sad. The language used in the media and the ease in presenting some positions and qualifications are frightening. Unfortunately, the media reflects the quality of political debate, which is making this situation even more tragic. Sometimes I have the feeling that nobody really cares about who is writing what about whom or on which issue, and that nobody really reads what's being written. If the politicians claim that they are the only ones who can be responsible for the future of this country, then they have to be responsible for every word they say.

In my daily meetings with politicians I say the same thing that I would now like to ask the media to observe – try to rise above politics and daily interests and try to look at Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens from a wider perspective; everybody should try, within their segment of

life and work, to do what he or she thinks would bring wellbeing and progress to this country and its citizens.

I would really like if voters would judge the rhetoric of local politicians before the next elections and cast their vote on the basis of this judgment. Let me repeat, politicians have to focus on real issues such as economy, the education system, the health system and not on cheap nationalist stories.

You will be one of the keynote speakers at a gathering with Sanja Vlaisavljević and Milorad Dodik on Tuesday, before the PIC session. Mrs. Vlaisavljević is supposedly involved in the culture of dialogue; yet she has publicly declared her commitment to the political party of her publisher, Fahrudin Radončić, who has recently stated that Duška Jurišić cannot, as a minority, be an editor in the Public Broadcasting Service. You are also aware of the Dodik's statements about the Markale Market and claims that judges of Muslim origin cannot adjudicate in cases involving Serbs. Is your socialising with them your personal contribution to the party axis – Radončić/Dodik – or are you passing a message from the International Community?

As a human being I can never reject dialogue. Even when I disagree with somebody I have to leave room for dialogue, as we cannot find a common language without dialogue. What is the alternative to dialogue? I have a very clear position on rhetoric and the meaning that some strong language may hold. For politicians, diplomats and journalists words are also deeds, so strong language can have very serious consequences. Those who advocate responsibility must also be responsible for the atmosphere that is being created by their contributions. Examples you have mentioned are terrible and just prove the need for the culture of dialogue. Hatred and prejudice just produce more hatred and prejudice, so we have to help people

overcome prejudice and understand how much damage they inflict on themselves and their people by such statements. When strong language becomes part of daily life, dialogue falls apart and it creates an atmosphere of lack of understanding and tension. I think my message is clear.