

Interview: Valentin Inzko, EU Special Representative and High Representative in BiH



Another attempt to gather party leaders in the so-called Butmir process has failed again. How do you comment on the persistent refusal of party leaders to take part in a «domestic dialogue» and in what direction will further talks be continued?

I think one of the problems in this country is a lack of dialogue that will lead to constructive solutions. On the other hand, there is too much public polemic and politicizing, which does not bring any results, but does «heat up» the situation. I do not see any important difference at all between a dialogue in which foreigners take part and one in which only local leaders participate. It is much more important that the participants are honest, well-meaning and wish to make progress and that they implement the agreements they make.

The latest US-EU initiative was based on a domestic dialogue. The international community only helps local politicians reach agreement among themselves. The international community is aware that it is not easy sometimes for local politicians to reach agreement and has offered its diplomatic and legal expertise in order for BiH politicians to be able to achieve some common results.

The final goal of these activities is clear. It is a step further on the road to the European Union, to better living conditions, higher living standards of this country's citizens. I do not know how anyone can think that problems will be resolved by themselves and that irresponsible behavior is the way to move this country forward at last and keep at least some of the promises that they have given to citizens left and right!

Do you believe in a positive outcome of the talks initiated in Butmir?

I hope BiH politicians will look at this initiative as an opportunity which they must not miss, and come to an agreement. I believe politicians will place the interests of citizens before their own and do what needs to be done: accelerate reforms and lead this country to the European Union and NATO. I do not want to speculate about the outcome of the talks, nor do I have a crystal ball in which I could see the final result. But, I do support the initiative.

Is the international community going to withdraw from the Butmir process if local leaders do not make concrete progress soon? Is there a possibility that solutions will be imposed by the international community?

No, there will be no impositions and this is exclusively the responsibility of domestic, democratically elected institutions and leaders. You must keep one thing in mind: both the EU and NATO are well-organized organizations that can function perfectly well without Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EU functioned for a while without Austria, too. But, the key question here is what sort of future can citizens here expect if their leaders continue to ignore their obligations and keep failing to reach agreement!

The alternative is pretty bleak: BiH will remain a non-functional state, poverty and unemployment can only rise, and the country will fall well behind others in the region when it comes to European integration. This is not our goal: we want BiH to be more functional, effective and on the road to the European Union.

The international community will not give up on Bosnia and Herzegovina: we have invested a huge amount of human, political and economic capital in this country. We are genuinely interested in the progress of this country, but this progress has to come from within.

What are your expectations from the PIC session scheduled for November 18? Can we expect a decision on the OHR-EUSR transformation?

There is very little time until the next PIC session. We have made certain progress in meeting the conditions for the closure of the OHR. We are, for example, completing the process of state property inventory. An amendment to the BiH Constitution, placing the Brčko District firmly within the Constitution, has been adopted, an important step towards full implementation of the Final Arbitration Award for Brčko, but this positive momentum was not followed up. This is not enough for me to be able to recommend closure of the OHR, or begin transition to an office of the EU Special Representative.

If we talk about the closure of the OHR, I think that because of a multitude of interpretations in the media many in BiH fail to grasp the essence of the issue: closure of the OHR is not a goal in itself but an indicator that the country has come to a stage in its development where it can go forward without the Office of the High Representative. The international community has a goal to ensure that BiH is a peaceful, viable and democratic country on its way to

integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions, and closure of the OHR is one of the milestones on this road.

Judging by the current situation, I think, unfortunately, we have not come to this milestone yet.

What is the status of investigation regarding the published organized crime schemes in the RS and the Federation of BiH allegedly produced by the OHR and when will the results of the investigation be known? Are you still defending your Deputy Raffi Gregorian?

Dr Gregorian is my closest associate and he has had and will have my full support in the work he is doing. Moreover, he is doing an excellent job that some people obviously do not like. I am of course not interested in what somebody may like or dislike. I and Raffi Gregorian, that is the High Representative and the Principal Deputy High Representative, have our mandate that we try to fulfill in a professional manner. The same applies to my associates in the OHR and the Office of the EU Special Representative. That's all I have to say.

The Entity Prime Ministers have rejected solutions imposed by you in the case of Elektroprijenos BiH. How do you comment on that and will you react?

I welcome the agreement reached between the Prime Minister of the Federation of BiH and the Prime Minister of the RS, and I hope their conclusions will soon be implemented in full. The Prime Ministers' efforts are not contradictory to my Decision of September 18, which ensured continuity in the functioning of Elektroprijenos BiH after the expiry of the General Director's mandate and actually made room for the Prime Ministers to reach the agreement.

When will the OHR's team complete the state inventory and is that process developing in accordance with the planned schedule?

Teams are on the ground, the process is ongoing and I expect that all offices will be visited and all relevant information collected in the course of the next week. We could have done it earlier if the RS had not prevented the collection of information for more than a month. However, we still have to wait for several more weeks. In any case, we have proven that the job can be done within a reasonable deadline. At the same time, the Working Group established by the Council of Ministers in April is still not operational.

When will the Brčko Supervision be terminated?

All preparations for the closure of the supervision are on hold. The closure process may be continued only when the RS accepts and fulfills all its obligations under the Arbitration Award that is final and binding for all sides.