

Interview: Valentin Inzko, EU Special Representative and High Representative in BiH: “We will prevent any conflict”



Dnevni avaz: Judging by the sentiment of the domestic actors, the Butmir Process failed even before it had even begun. Do you share this impression?

Valentin Inzko: All BiH political leaders agreed at Butmir to continue with the talks, which is good news for me. It was only in this meeting that the International Community put on the table concrete documents on constitutional change and property. It is necessary to continue working and see how one can reach a compromise. It is local politicians and local media that will be responsible for the outcome of this process. So, one needs to have political will and create a positive climate for the process to succeed. The International Community will gladly continue making its contribution to this process.

An important outcome of the Butmir meeting is the fact that it is absolutely clear that there is agreement in BiH that this country should join the Euro-Atlantic family in the future. It is clear to everybody that membership in the EU and NATO is

the only safe way towards a prosperous future for Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens. Therefore, I think it is important that the process we began at Butmir continues and I hope BiH leaders will realize how important and significant this is for the future of the country.

I am fully convinced that this is the genuine wish of the vast majority of BiH citizens – and because of them and for their benefit, we must redouble our efforts for this process to succeed. There is no other serious alternative.

Dnevni avaz: What consequences for the OHR does the Butmir Process have, regardless of whether it succeeds or fails?

Valentin Inzko: The future of the OHR, for me, is absolutely known. It is only when the five goals and two conditions set by the Peace Implementation Council are met that an OHR-EUSR transition will take place. I do not wish to speculate at this time about how the Butmir Process will end and what consequences it will have for the OHR. However, it is known that I am following a well-prepared transition.

Dnevni avaz: To what extent do constitutional changes become an integral part of the OHR-EUSR transition?

Valentin Inzko: There are no additional conditions for the closure of the OHR, so, constitutional changes in BiH are not a precondition for the closure of the OHR.

However, constitutional reform is necessary in order to improve the functioning of the BiH institutions. I will repeat what Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said, which is that only a country with fully functioning institutions can be a credible candidate for EU membership. The Constitution needs to be changed if BiH wishes to accelerate towards the EU, and there is nothing unclear about this.

Dnevni avaz: Is the OHR as an institution (not you personally as the High Representative) buried by being practically excluded from the Butmir Process?

Valentin Inzko: The OHR took part in the Butmir Process – my Office provided very concrete, expert advice. Five legal and political assistants at an expert level worked with others on the preparations for Butmir for nearly a month. As you could see in the media, I supported this process and will continue supporting it because I think this country needs dialog, more functionality and it needs to take the next step towards the EU.

The presence of the highest officials at these talks is an indicator to me of the unity of the International Community when it comes to supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina in its efforts to move forward in Euro-Atlantic integration. I do not see anyone being excluded; on the contrary, this was one of the highest level meetings on BiH since Dayton, and we are all there with the same goal: to reach agreement and move forward.

Dnevni avaz: What are the chances for the OHR to be closed at the PIC session of 18 and 19 November?

Valentin Inzko: As I said, the closure of the OHR depends on whether 5 + 2 is met. In its next session the Peace Implementation Council will consider what has been done so far. I have to say that at this moment we cannot brag about the progress achieved on the issues of state and military property and Brčko. As you know, questions related to property are a part of the Butmir Process.

I don't want to and I cannot anticipate the conclusions of the PIC once they have reviewed all the information. I believe – and this has happened before – that when there is political will, many issues in this country can be resolved very quickly.

So it is up to the leaders of BiH to achieve progress on these issues before the next session of the Peace Implementation Council.

Dnevni avaz: Having in mind the lessons learned during the Butmir talks so far, what would you suggest to foreign mediators?

Valentin Inzko: I do not want to talk to the international community through the media. I use diplomatic channels. The international community is aware of my positions; my messages have already reached the capitals.

But I also have a message for BiH politicians and the people of BiH. With sincere political will and a readiness to compromise, the process of changes can be successful. If that happens, no one will lose anything, instead we will all win – a more functional, more cost-effective state on its way to the European Union. Think of the alternative – a non-functional state of poor people, a country that lags behind others in the region when it comes to European integration. Or, as Joseph Biden put it, being irrelevant is worse than being poor.

I would like to use this opportunity and invite the media to be constructive and support the process that is underway.

Dnevni avaz: The OHR will leave sooner or later. What kind of EUSR will inherit its role? With what kind of human and financial resources and what kind of powers? (Will it include non-Europeans, what is the status of the Bonn Powers, will the EUSR be able to sanction politicians and in which way – seizing property, black-listing people, depriving them of financial assistance...)

Valentin Inzko: Let us first resolve one issue, let us first meet the conditions and objectives of the Peace Implementation Council and close the OHR. That is our first task. The EUSR

will certainly be strengthened, both in human resources and in any other way.

The Bonn Powers are a thing of the OHR; the EUSR will have no such mechanism at his/her disposal. However, the European Union does possess different instruments that it successfully applies and I see no reason why they would not be applied in the case of BiH too. The participation of non-Europeans in the EUSR is something that is being discussed at the moment. The EUSR will be ready to fully assume his/her obligations once the time for that comes. That is when we will talk in detail about the mandate of the EUSR and the mechanisms that it will be using. At this moment our priority is fulfilling the conditions and objectives for transition.

Dnevni avaz: How do you view the proposal of three former High Representatives for the OHR to leave BiH and be moved to the West, with Bonn Powers that would be used to prevent deterioration of the situation in BiH and annulment of reforms achieved so far?

Valentin Inzko: I appreciate and respect the opinions of my predecessors in the position of the High Representative very much. They are all people who are very well acquainted with the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I do not want to take any position on that idea publicly. Such important things should first be discussed discreetly and then explained.

Dnevni avaz: Dodik keeps threatening with referenda. Do you have any realistic mechanisms to prevent him?

Valentin Inzko: All leaders in BiH, including Mr. Dodik, of course, must understand the responsibility of public speech. With such statements and unrealistic talk he can eventually only harm himself and his people.

Dnevni avaz: Foreign media have been writing about the danger

of a new war in BiH more than local ones. How realistic are such warnings?

Valentin Inzko: They are not realistic. The International Community has all capacities to prevent any sort of conflict and you can rest assured that it would do so. Media often use sensationalism for one reason or another, but I believe that it is very irresponsible to speculate like that when it comes to BiH. The wounds of this country have still not healed and no one should be opening new ones. That is absolutely irresponsible.