

Dnevni list: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



By Dario Lukić

Dnevni list: Are you satisfied with the recent meeting with Milorad Dodik in Banja Luka, and does your discussion with Dodik represent a turn for the better in the relationship between the OHR and the RS, to the benefit of the state? Have you touched upon the judiciary and Dodik's referendum, and will the spirits calm down with regard to that issue?

Valentin Inzko: Yes I am satisfied. It is always good to talk and present one's stances directly. Naturally, we have different views on many issues, but that does not prevent us from having correct and professional relations. I met not only with President Dodik, but also with other RS leaders, including Prime Minister Cvijanovic and RSNA Speaker Cubrilovic, as well as with representatives of the Alliance for Change parties.

And yes, we did talk about various issues related to judiciary. My views on the referendum are well known, and I used this opportunity to once again share them with the leadership of Republika Srpska. An entity has every right to hold referenda on matters that fall within its competencies, which is also what the RS Law on Referendum stipulates. However, the state judiciary and the powers of the High Representative do not fall into this category. These are the facts, which I stated clearly once again.

With regards to the referendum I very much welcome the signals from the authorities that this will be put to one side and this is exactly what I said in Banja Luka.

Dnevni list: How does the situation in BiH look to you after BiH officially handed in its application to the EU? In talks with ordinary citizens the impression one gets is that currently they are not very interested in the act of handing in the application, but in concrete and visible results of the work of political leaders. Are citizens right to be sceptical?

Valentin Inzko: Without a doubt, the submission of an application for EU membership was a historic moment for the country. You do it only once. In my country it was Dr. Alois Mock who handed the application over, and we still remember this fact.

Let me again congratulate the citizens of this country on taking this step. This represents a commitment to transform the country's institutions in preparation for membership. This also means hard work as well as a readiness to reach healthy compromises that deliver concrete progress not only in terms of meeting EU standards, but perhaps more importantly raising living standards for ordinary citizens in the future.

I do understand that some people remain sceptical, not least because they are well aware that achieving membership will require a fundamental change in the way politics is conducted. Over the years, people have heard so many promises that were never fulfilled, so I understand why some are sceptical, but we must remain positive and leaders must finally start to deliver the changes the country needs.

If BiH leaders want their citizens to trust them again, they must dramatically change their way of conducting politics. This is a test and they are facing it right now! BiH also needs systematic changes that will benefit the people, which the EU integration process will inevitably trigger. I believe

it is possible if the country can pull together around a common vision. This is why EU membership is doubly important for BiH, not only in terms of raising standards but also as an opportunity to work together toward a shared vision and a shared dream. So let's roll up our sleeves.

This is a view I think most people share. After all, the vast majority of citizens wholeheartedly support the goal of integration with the European Union.

Dnevni list: Have we gone backwards in BiH when it comes to discrimination? For example, earlier one could see discrimination against least numerous peoples, whereas today when people are looking for jobs they are treated in line with their party affiliations and family ties? They do not even try to hide when, for example, leading people in the state place their relatives on important managing positions in the country? Isn't that tragic? At that, they give arrogant statements and people simply put up with it, with their heads down? Here is one banal example. The best university student from Mostar, with a number of rector's awards, was not hired as one of 100 interns in the Government of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton, whereas a large number of those who are directly related to people from the ruling parties were hired. Her comment to that was 'I apologise for being the best student'. What sort of message is that sending to young people in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: Corruption and nepotism are devouring this country from the inside. Corruption is poison for society. What you have just described unfortunately happens all too often. It is not acceptable, and such practices can be rejected if citizens refuse to accept them. BiH can move forward only through healthy competition among its best and the brightest. Otherwise it risks permanent stagnation.

Nepotism is a major reason why so many young people are leaving this country. It is alarming. Wouldn't it be much better if they could fulfil their potential here? Wouldn't it

be great if people like Ervin Sejdic could make their future here? Ervin is among a hundred young scientists awarded by US President Obama with the prestigious Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE). Another example is Aida Hadzialic, the Swedish Minister of Education whom I will meet next week.

While it is perfectly understandable that people leave their country during a war, everything should be done to prevent this from happening now. Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently needs to reverse this demographic trend.

Dnevni list: Election Law? Do you think that the so-called current political elites are capable and willing to make a step forward that would mean the end of repression against those who are a minority? Will Mr. Sejdić and Mr. Finci live to see justice? In your opinion, which solution would be fair and how can it be reached?

Valentin Inzko: It is symptomatic and regrettable that most of the discussion about Sejdic-Finci has to do with the position of one of the constituent peoples rather than with the ongoing discrimination against Roma, Jews and other people who do not fit neatly into the three-way division of this country. I think we can move forward in a way that meets the concerns of all if there is the political will and the flexibility to do so.

A fair solution is one that is agreed upon by all and the one that makes everyone feel comfortable in BiH. Any form of discrimination goes against the very fabric of this country.

The Constitution and its electoral arrangements will have to be brought in line with the European Court's ruling and the European Convention on Human Rights. This will eliminate outright discrimination and assure that every citizen in BiH enjoys the same rights. And do not forget, in Dayton the Others were mentioned with a capital "O". This was not a

coincidence. Like in former Yugoslavia, with the capitalized form of "Muslim".

Dnevni list: Mostar, or '*Čudna jada od Mostara grada*' (the title of a well-known old folk song, meaning 'The Plight of the City of Mostar')? What if once again elections do not take place in Mostar? Who will be to blame, where should the citizens go to protest?

Valentin Inzko: I am not sure the citizens of Mostar feel like singing. They probably feel more like crying because they continue to be denied the basic right to elect their local representatives.

The two most responsible parties – SDA and HDZ BiH – are talking, and that is good. I welcome this, but now they must finally deliver. At this moment, we are not aware of any formal agreements reached by the parties. I will continue encouraging all parties to negotiate in good faith in order to implement the ruling of the BiH Constitutional Court, so that the voters in Mostar can finally elect their local representatives.

One thing which the international community cannot and will not accept is the division of Mostar.

The OHR remains available to assist the parties in reaching an agreement, but we need to see readiness to give up entrenched positions and negotiate in good faith. This will require a softening of attitudes and a basic level of political will.

As for the proper address for protests, I believe the ruling of the Constitutional Court of BiH obliges the BiH Parliamentary Assembly to make the necessary changes. Indirectly this means that political parties bear most of the responsibility for this issue, not only in the Parliament but also on the ground in Mostar.

Dnevni list: Lately there have been more and more threats by

ISIL directed against Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular Reisu-l-ulema Kavazović. What is your comment on that?

Valentin Inzko: Terrorism in all of its forms needs to be faced head on. Problems exist and cannot be ignored. I wholeheartedly welcome the positive statements and initiatives launched by Reisu-l-ulema Kavazovic and the Islamic Community of BiH.

Dnevni list: You do not comment on court proceedings. But can you say whether in the Radončić case pressure was exercised on the judiciary by key political actors in the state? It even went so far that Izetbegović directly said that the Court should release Radončić, and Čović had some similar statements.

Valentin Inzko: I expect everyone to refrain from putting pressure on judicial institutions, and allow them to do their jobs. I also expect all relevant authorities to act with the highest standards of professionalism, equity, and accountability.

The judiciary, as one of the pillars of democracy, should be strengthened and improved at all levels, and not weakened. When it comes to the Court of BiH and the BiH Prosecutor's Office, this should be done through state-level institutions and the structured dialogue.

As a first step, politicians in this country would help immensely by refraining from commenting on specific cases. This is a basic norm and we need to start seeing it respected because – let's be frank – at the moment it is not. This is about basic social and political norms or what one of my predecessors described as "standards in public life." We need to start sticking to those standards again. The whole society will benefit.