EuroBlic: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By: Nedeljka Breberina

EuroBlic: Are the claims of foreigners' interference in the elections in BiH true and how will the International Community approach the electoral process in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: Being somewhat ironic, I am afraid that the International Community has not intervened enough. We should have been more insistent when it comes to ballot scanning and other technical improvements that would help ensure a free and fair election.

Such ungrounded claims and constant conspiracy theories by some BiH politicians are a part of a long-term political strategy. Some politicians want to present themselves as defenders of their constituent people and their entity, and as victims of the International Community. They benefit from that at the elections and privately.

There are several reasons they are attacking the International Community without any cause. When it comes to the RS, the current President wants to cover up the fact that he was once a very constructive partner of the International Community. He once also admitted that genocide was committed. Now he claims Srebrenica was fabricated by the Americans. That is repulsive.

Secondly, they use this kind of rhetoric to divert attention from issues that are really important to the citizens: jobs, healthcare, roads, fight against corruption. They would never admit that their entity is in poor condition because of their bad policies. And even if I am wrong, people are still voting by leaving the country.

The International Community wants to be a partner to this

country. We want to help this country become a functioning, prosperous state. But, on the other hand, we cannot allow some irresponsible politicians to undermine all the positive things that were created after the war. Some politicians would like the International Community to finance them by means of international financial institutions, but without asking questions or having an opinion.

EuroBlic: Has the present election campaign in BiH been fair and honest, and have the political parties turned their focus on voters rather than nationalist rhetoric?

Valentin Inzko: Unfortunately, there has been too little attention and focus on the real needs of the citizens: better pensions, education, justice, the quality of healthcare, investments, more jobs, security. Instead, some political parties and candidates seem more inclined to focus their energy on divisive rhetoric and demagoguery. Listening to the speeches and reading the remarks of some candidates on a daily basis, it is impossible not to come to the conclusion that their primary objective is self-interest rather than what's best for the country and its people. The real issues remain unmentioned or barely touched upon, just for the sake of it.

An analysis of the pre-election activities of political entities in BiH carried out by the Center for Election Studies shows that only 14% of media statements so far have been referring to concrete issues. The rest consists of empty words without supporting arguments. It is my honest hope that citizens will punish such behavior come Election Day and use their own Bonn powers, browse the lists carefully and vote for candidates who treated them with respect, and who can deliver results.

EuroBlic: Does the present Election Law, and the electoral system, guarantee in practice the legality and legitimacy of the October elections? This mainly refers to fraud involving voters who live abroad, large number of deceased people still

registered as voters, political pressure on voters, etc.

Valentin Inzko: This is indeed a legitimate question, but I cannot give you a straightforward answer as this does not fall under my mandate. It is clear to citizens that political parties have a great appetite for cheating at the elections, but I will have to direct you to the BiH Central Election Commission which is the institution responsible for election-related matters. For example, as some media have reported, there are 2,000 people in Trnovo but 4,000 voters. Some voters abroad have also registered non-existing addresses. Thousands of voters are over 100 years old, etc.

EuroBlic: Do you have any information about the possibility of political parties organizing public protests after the elections?

Valentin Inzko: No, I do not.

EuroBlic: Will the OHR interfere if the FBiH House of Peoples does not get formed after the elections – and with it the BiH House of the Peoples – because the amendments to the Election Law have not been adopted?

Valentin Inzko: While it is true that this could make it difficult to form the FBiH House of Peoples, the priority at this point is for the elections to take place in a fair and free manner, and for citizens to exercise their democratic right. Election results need to be implemented swiftly. No political party has the right to block the implementation of the election result simply because it is not happy with the outcome.

EuroBlic: Will the OHR's mandate end any time soon?

Valentin Inzko: My mandate remains intact. I retain all the instruments at my disposal. As long as the conditions for the closure of OHR are not met, this OHR will remain open. Essentially, the closure of the OHR depends on a "positive

assessment of the political situation," i.e. the political will of BiH politicians to move the country in a positive direction rather than create crisis and turmoil.

Allow me to use this opportunity to address the voters, not only as the High Representative but also as a European. I wish to reiterate that, on 7 October, voters will have the opportunity to decide on their future. They can choose between confrontation and normality, between stagnation and progress. On 7 October, they should not be afraid of political pressure and intimidation. They should resist any manipulation of their vote. They should cast their ballot with dignity. These are their elections, their democratic power, and they should use it wisely. They should use their pen, their own Bonn powers. They should also be aware that, if they do not vote, the election results will decide their fate regardless, but without their participation.

Their lives will be decided on without their involvement. So get out and vote!