

FENA: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



– The RS is again announcing a referendum. This time, they are announcing a referendum on the RS Day, to be held on September 25. What is your opinion about this decision? How will the OHR react in case the RS starts truly preparing for a referendum?

The decision taken by the RS National Assembly on July 15 regarding a referendum in RS on the issue of RS Day violates the General Framework Agreement for Peace.

According to this decision, the voters in RS are asked to answer decide on a question that has already been decided upon by the Constitutional Court of BiH. The BiH Constitution clearly states that the decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court are final and binding and the the entities are bound to comply with decisions of the institutions of BiH.

Let me remind you that the BiH Constitutional Court, as an integral part of Annex 4 of the Dayton Peace Agreement has exclusive jurisdiction to decide on disputes arising under the BiH Constitution and that all authorities in BiH, including the RS authorities, are bound to implement its decisions.

Decisions of the BiH Constitutional Court are not an *a la carte* menu where you respect the ones you like and reject the ones you don't. When a court takes a decision, there will always be some groups which approve of the decision and others who do not agree with it. For example, when the Constitutional Court upheld the RS authorities in their case to remove the

“Bosanski” prefix from a number of places in the RS, many political actors in BiH did not like this decision, but it was respected. Similarly, many political actors may not like the court’s decision on Mostar, but they are working to implement it. No one is holding a referendum to say that they will never implement the court’s decision on Mostar. And so on.

Rather than going against the decisions of a court, the authorities in the RS should be working together with others to resolve issues through dialogue. I firmly believe that all political disagreements can be resolved using the existing constitutional framework and through constructive dialogue. That is the way forward and I call upon the RS authorities to put this referendum aside and take action to implement the ruling of the BiH Constitutional Court.

– The RSNA has adopted a law on publication of census results. Does the OHR recognize this decision, and does it have any legal standing, i.e. will the OHR react and what will that reaction be?

I took note of the publication of the first result of the 2013 population census in BiH. The results of the census are essential for the country’s economic and social planning and as such will support the implementation of the Reform Agenda and the European integration process.

As I said earlier I believe that Director Jukic was fully acting in accordance with the Law and within his mandate. The final assessment of the IMO will cover the whole census operation, including preparations, enumeration, processing and editing and dissemination of the final results.

– BiH’s Euro-Atlantic road has come to a complete halt, as evident in the refusal of the SAA and the blockade of the path towards NATO. In your view, who are the main culprits for this turn of events, and what should be done to again move BiH along this path?

Leaders must pull together, that's the first priority! Let's hope that they learned this lesson well – obstruction and delay bring good to no one. Turning everything into a political issue and wasting months on fruitless bickering will never result in BiH realizing its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Elected leaders have to get serious – serious reforms are needed and their implementation must accelerate, the rule of law must be strengthened, functionality improved, investment attracted, jobs created and major progress made. None of that can be done if the country does not pull together and work on these issues.

– **The RS President Milorad Dodik has accused the International Community of being the main disruptive factor in BiH. What do you think about these accusations, as well as the overall role of the International Community in BiH? In this context, how do you view Russia's role in the PIC, and its overall policies in the Western Balkans?**

In poll after poll, the vast majority of citizens in both entities, have said that they want this country to become part of the European Union. All of the country's political actors, including President Dodik, have expressed the same goal. Over the last few years, the EU has given the country's leadership numerous opportunities to move toward the EU, with the stability and prosperity membership will afford.

Given all of this, the only thing which is holding this country back is certain political leaders generating artificial crises in order to distract attention from their failure to implement reforms and improve people's lives. If Milorad Dodik and a few other leaders would spend more time resolving concrete issues together and less time trying to maintain political and financial power by scaring their voters, conditions would quickly improve for everyday people.

Regarding the role of the international community, as I have

said many times, the role has changed, or to use maybe a better term – evolved over the years. Taking a conscious step back to encourage local ownership of problems and issues was the right thing to do. Local leaders now need to do the job they claimed they were ready and willing to do. One may argue that we took this step too early, but it was and still is our belief that this country must stand on its own two feet, be it judiciary or politics and its leaders must prove that they are capable of taking the country forward. If not, they should be voted out of office.

As for the role of Russia in the PIC, I have always greatly valued and appreciated their contributions. We do have different views as to how certain issues should be dealt with, and around the world BiH is not the only issue over which our opinions may differ. What is important is that we share a common goal – BiH as a stable and prosperous country, its territorial integrity and full sovereignty. That has not changed. I would refrain from commenting on Russian foreign policy, or the foreign policy of any other country, as that clearly is not in my mandate as High Representative for BiH.

– How can the decision by British voters to leave the EU – Brexit – affect BiH’s European integration process?

BiH has chosen its direction and that is the EU. I do not think that the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the EU will affect this path. Perhaps there will be attempts by the very few who oppose BiH’s EU path in general to make a connection to the events in the UK, but I believe they won’t get far.

– BiH will hold local elections in October. What do you expect when it comes to the campaign, and what is your message to voters in BiH?

My first message to the voters is the same as before every election: go out and vote! It does not matter if you are happy or dissatisfied with the way the situation is right now, go to

your polling station and cast your ballot! Use your individual Bonn powers ! Every vote matters.

These are local elections and you may personally know some of the candidates on the lists. I encourage you to ignore all the big talk during the election campaign and focus on what those standing for elected office would do to address local issues and problems that affect your daily life. That would be my message.

– **How do you comment Moneyval's latest decision on BiH?**

The latest decision concerning BiH on anti-money laundering and the financing of counter terrorism compliance was taken by the European Commission and it indeed was not good news. The EC has decided to put BiH on the list along with 10 other countries as 'high risk' for having strategic deficiencies in the field. This is not where BiH wants to be. This problem stems from longstanding requirements and basic standards, which BiH has yet to meet, on regulations and laws related to anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing. I think this serves as yet another example where BiH needs to understand that joining the family of democracies that respect the rule of law is not an 'a la carte' exercise. BiH needs to learn to play by the rules and not look for special exceptions. The real world simply doesn't work that way. BiH can turn this around if it makes significant progress on its anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing action plans.