

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

Global: Half a year ago, we sat at this same place and talked about the political situation in BiH. You were optimistic then, but, obviously things are not getting better. In your opinion, why has the situation become complicated? Who bears most responsibility?

Valentin Inzko: You are right when you say that things are not getting better. The European Union and the international community are engaged in BiH very seriously and at the highest levels, but, unfortunately, there was no constructive response on the part of local political leaders. Instead of moving forward on the road to Euroatlantic integration, like other countries in the region, BiH stagnates. For a while now, we have not seen a single reform that would contribute to the effectiveness and functionality of the state. The first reason for this are political elites that do not show readiness for agreement and are too much concerned with how they can maintain themselves in power. The second reason is of a systemic nature – BiH is a non-functional state to a certain extent, its bureaucracy is expensive, and with such a complicated system it will be difficult to make faster and greater progress on the road to EU membership. And it is exactly because of this that politicians in BiH should find it in their interest to make systemic changes which would facilitate the functioning of the state and reforms.

The problem of BiH is that politicians often look into the past instead of turning to the future. They deal with referendums instead of legislation which would accelerate BiH's road to the European Union. I think politicians of this

country do not care enough about their citizens. How can one interpret differently the fact that BiH is so late in the visa liberalization process? If they had enough will to do what is required from them, then BiH citizens would already be traveling to EU countries without visas. However, instead of this, politicians in this country spend their energy looking for culprits for this situation.

Global: Is the PIC, in its session to be held in this month, going to make some important decisions or is it just going to state that the international community is concerned over the situation in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: As always, the PIC session will analyze the whole situation in BiH. I do not want to go into the details, but I can tell you that one of the accents will surely be on progress, or lack of progress, in the implementation of the «5 plus 2» program.

Meeting these conditions and goals is a priority and once it does this BiH will show that it is ready to make the next steps in the process of European integration. What the PIC conclusions will be remains to be seen.

What is known is the expectations that the PIC has of BiH in this year. BiH leaders are expected to make intergovernmental agreements for state and defense property. Also, BiH needs a law to be able to conduct a population census in 2011 in accordance with relevant EU requirements. And let me remind you that the PIC has repeatedly stressed the importance of adopting and implementing a strategy for implementation of Annex VII which refers to return.

Global: You have launched a new round of negotiations with domestic leaders. What conclusions can you draw from what they told you?

Valentin Inzko: What I concluded, unfortunately, is that in some issues there has been no convergence of views. Everyone is more or less focused on elections. What is necessary is for leaders to achieve mutual understanding with respect to what needs to be done immediately. First of all, the time until the elections must be used to build a road leading to European

integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, rather than placing obstacles on that road. All this must be done regardless of elections!

Global: How would you comment the diplomatic offensive of Turkey connecting Belgrade and Sarajevo, thus trying to take over the role of the leader in the region? Is this a good thing for the country?

Valentin Inzko: Any initiative that leads BiH forward and contributes to understanding and positive cooperation in the region is welcome. I welcome it fully, and I support great efforts of minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. I think this could be in synergy with the efforts of the European Union in BiH. Bringing Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to the European Union will contribute to stability in the Western Balkans. Countries and their politicians will implement the necessary reforms, they will focus their energy on finding compromises on specific issues and laws that must be passed and implemented in order to get closer to EU. This means that the politicians in this country will have to turn to the future. This is the kind of political dynamic that I want for Bosnia and Herzegovina! I think it is high time for BiH to make significant progress on the road to the EU. If politicians found political strength to reach compromise on certain issues, then the road could be shorter. Citizens would profit the most because it would lead to economic development, reducing unemployment and increasing salaries. Citizens should think very carefully whom they should vote for at the elections – for the past or this kind of future!

Global: We often hear comments about possible appointment of a special US envoy for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Does this country really need such an envoy, taking into account your presence, namely OHR?

Valentin Inzko: Actually, the US representatives in BiH should answer this question. On my part I can only say that OHR and USA, as well as the rest of the international community in BiH, share the same goals in BiH: a stable and prosperous state. Also, America already has its envoy in BiH, and his name is Charles English.

Global: Before arriving to Sarajevo Mrs Ashton announced she would strengthen your position, because that is what is required right now. What does this specifically pertain to?

Valentin Inzko: Mrs Ashton will visit Bosnia and Herzegovina on Thursday, 18 February 2010. The new structure of the European Union entrusted with foreign affairs recognised the challenges that BiH is facing, so this visit should be viewed from that perspective. New structures will certainly bring about some changes in their approach to BiH, as well as a new focus, while the primary goal, namely BiH as a EU member, will remain the same.

Global: The Law on referendum in the RS has been adopted. A few days ago in Banja Luka you stated that there would be no problems if it was going to be a referendum within the RS. What does that mean, can you clarify it a little bit?

Valentin Inzko: In Banja Luka I said that we in the international community make a difference between the existence of the current law and the referendum itself. Now, when this law exists, we will analyze and study it in detail. Then we will decide if, that is, how to react. Precisely, in Banja Luka I wanted to say that what it will be important is the fact whether the Law on referendum pertains to the competencies of the state and the Dayton or just competencies of the entity. The RS Government is required to respect the Dayton Agreement and High Representatives' decisions fully, there is no dilemma about it or any possibility to deviate from it.

Although my view is that the authorities in the RS are using the referendum issue as part of the pre-electoral campaign, both I and the rest of the international community believe that this is a very serious question. Those who supported and adopted this law have embarked on a dangerous road and take the Dayton Agreement lightly, which brought peace to this country and all its people. If they were to ask a question on supporting the Dayton Agreement, for me this would be a sign that politicians are playing with very serious matters. Ultimately, they are also playing with Republika Srpska itself, for without the Dayton Agreement it would not have

existed. They should think hard about what irresponsible politicians have let themselves into.

Global: You have announced that local leaders probably will not be invited to this session. Why?

Valentin Inzko: In the course of the previous week I had a series of meetings and consultations with party leaders, precisely as part of preparations for the forthcoming PIC session, and I got the impression that there is not enough readiness to make moves forward during the election year – it seems that this state will waste the fourth year too.

The PIC session will be attended by institutional representatives of the state, members of the Council of Ministers of BiH and the PIC will hear from representatives of the institutions if they will too sit on their hands in the coming nine months or if they will still do something in order to try to convince voters that they should vote for them again in October. This will at the same time be a message that the international community supports all, I reiterate all, institutions at the state level.

Global: What about the story on the state property? You made the inventory, but still there are no concrete moves forward i.e. enactment of appropriate laws?

Valentin Inzko: OHR completed the inventory and this was the only concrete move forward with regard to the state property. We identified 979 state property units in BiH and 21 units abroad, the total of 1000 units, and this inventory was forwarded in December last year to both the Council of Ministers of BiH and other levels of government. They are those, that is to say, the Council of Ministers, governments of the RS and the Federation of BiH respectively and the Government of the Brčko District, that should sit down and cut a deal, reach an agreement on how to ensure that every level of government owns the property it needs to carry out its constitutional and legal competencies in an undisturbed way.