

Interview: Valentin Inzko, EU Special Representative and High Representative in BiH: “Constitutional Reform Is Not My Personal Priority”

Interviewer: Nevenko Erić

Sarajevo, 15 April (SRNA) – The international representative in BiH Valentin Inzko says that the constitutional reform is not his personal priority. However, it is with the great interest that he follows all the developments and expects from politicians in BiH to agree on this issue on their own.

“I would be happy to see it happen but by means of your own forces and your own agreements. I would rather prefer if the parties agreed on this on their own – the Prud Troika or six-man group or seven-man group, and to have an inclusive process with involvement of several actors because it would then be easier to ensure the two-third majority during the vote in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH”, emphasized Inzko in his interview to the News Agency of the Republika Srpska (SRNA).

He claims to be unwilling to give advice on a manner in which the constitutional reform should proceed and be finalized but believes that the constitutional reform should result in a more efficient and functional state that is also more cost-effective.

According to Inzko, harmonization of the BiH Constitution with the European Charter on Human Rights is one of the priorities within the constitutional reform.

Speaking about the role of international community within constitutional reform, Inzko emphasized that there is never one single factor but several factors that influence a process.

“During this process, it would be necessary to accept and take into account the best European practice and the positions of relevant institutions such as the Venice Commission”, recommended Inzko.

He did not want to speculate on territorial organization of BiH, emphasizing that the best option would be to have an agreement on this issue reached by leaders themselves.

“There are several proposals but I would not comment on any of them. It is important that everybody feels nice and comfortable and has his “sweet nest” in which he feels like at home. The politicians should agree along these lines”, said Inzko.

According to Inzko, the economic pressure now gives a chance to change something within the BiH Constitution, in order to make state administration more cost-effective.

Inzko emphasized that, in terms of his priorities, the most important thing now for BiH is to urgently fulfill five objectives and two conditions required for the consideration of the OHR/EUSR transition; these priorities also include the implementation of the Dayton Agreement that still has not been implemented in full and BiH’s accession to the EU.

“Speaking about economy, there are six areas – energy, infrastructure, information systems, agriculture, forestry and tourism. I want the entire BiH to be a huge construction site; I want people to have jobs and earn money”, said Inzko, adding that the funds of international financial institutions should

be properly put to use in the best possible way.

Speaking about the visa abolishment, Inzko emphasized that he would be personally committed to having the visas abolished as soon as possible, but that it is certainly not going to happen during the Czech Presidency over the EU and that he could not guarantee that it could even happen before the end of the year.

“There is the Road Map with 174 conditions out of which 147 have been fulfilled. There are 27 that still have to be fulfilled, which is a relatively small number out of 147 conditions in total. Out of these 27 conditions, 9 are sensitive. I think it is possible to identify some common grounds in order to fulfill those 9 conditions, i.e. 27”, said Inzko, adding that BiH authorities are on a good track to meet this objective as they have already taken some measures to this end, such as preparations for the printing of the biometric passports.

According to his opinion, it would be necessary to improve border control in relation to a problem of illegal immigrants.

He expects that BiH will become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council on the January 1, with the OHR or without it, and believes there are very good chances for this happen.

“The closure of the OHR will be decided by the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council at its sessions in June or October”, announced Inzko.

Speaking about the Bonn powers the international representative in BiH stated that their use should be considered again, in case there is a serious violation of the Dayton Agreement and BiH Constitution.

“The Bonn powers have been introduced in order to speed up

some things in BiH and prevent blockage and resolve some issues. They were used immediately after the end of the war. The situation now is completely different and the focus is a little bit different. My predecessor Miroslav Lajčák used the Bonn powers some 40 times and this is not being mentioned very often", explained Inzko.

He believes that the USA will not appoint its special representative for the Balkans and BiH but even if they do he will closely cooperate with him.

"After the elections, the USA is thoroughly reviewing its policy towards the Balkans. State Secretary Hilary Clinton is very interested in the Balkans and BiH. I view their attitude towards my nomination to the position of the High Representative within their thorough analysis; they had carefully studied it and gave me their support", explained Inzko.

Speaking about the economic situation in BiH, he emphasized that he was very pleased with the information that the RS has a surplus in the Budget and holds reserves from the privatization process and that he is sorry that it is not the case in the Federation of BiH.

"I have spoken with the Federation authorities on a dire economic situation in that Entity. I have information that the Federation does not have sufficient budgetary funds to cover all expenditures – the disabled, soldiers etc. Our discussion focused on identifying ways to overcome the crisis; a review of the Budget has been specially considered and should be enacted by mid May. We also discussed possibilities for mitigating the effects of the international crisis and putting credits by international financial institutions to a better use", emphasized Inzko.

According to him, the OHR has also made a plan for making

savings and combating global economic crisis and its Budget has been reduced.

Speaking about the work of his predecessors, Inzko emphasized that the greatest number of things important for BiH – such as the flag, national anthem, vehicle number plates – happened during the time of Carlos Westendorp, which is not often in focus.

“Wolfgang Petritsch has done a lot for the constituent status of peoples throughout BiH and for the rule of law. It was the most difficult for Carl Bildt who was the first High Representative, immediately after the war”, said Inzko adding that he wishes the period of his tenure in office of the High Representative will be spoken about in the future as the time of BiH’s economic progress and the abolishment of the visa regime for BiH citizens.