

Interview: Valentin Inzko, High Representative and EU Special Representative in BiH: “Dialogue and compromise from Prud must be continued”

Valentin Inzko, EU Special Representative and High Representative to BiH in an interview for Sarajevo-x.com speaks about the importance and success of his mission in BiH, about the vision he has, Bosnia and Herzegovina's politicians, the necessity to continue the Prud negotiations, frameworks for the EU enlargement and the attitude that BiH politicians should have towards their work.

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Interviewed by: Ahmed Burić

Sarajevo-x: All eyes are on you. It could be said that the perception of what the previous High Representatives had done is, it seems, more negative than positive. The country is divided, nationalistic concepts are still hindering development, there is also the coming crisis as well as recession. Objectively, how difficult is your task and how complicated is the situation BiH is in?

Valentin Inzko: Well, it is much more difficult than it can seem to be to someone who's watching from afar. My primary task as the High Representative is the implementation of the Dayton agreement, and as the EUSR – assisting the process of reforms needed for BiH to get closer to the Euro-Atlantic integration. Everyone have their own vision of BiH and they expect me to support precisely their vision, regardless of to what extent that vision might be realistic or good for BiH. In

my work I will be guided by a vision if I am doing something good for this country or not. The country is in a serious economic and political situation. That is why discussions should be conducted and comprise solutions found, while putting narrow party politics on the back burner.

Sarajevo-x: The other day while visiting the RS Government president Milorad Dodik you said that you and him had similar views on the further road of BiH and that you had agreed that there should be joint work on the transition of the OHR into the Office of the EU Special Representative. Never – not a bit- doubting your good intentions, one must note that it is difficult to believe that Dodik, who, together with Silajdžić, has lately been one of the biggest brakes in BiH when it comes to its opening towards Europe, will so suddenly change his course. Are you completely sure that with the existing structure of politicians we can go forward and how can that be ensured?

Valentin Inzko: It is up to you to elect politicians and it is up to me to work with them in order to accelerate the European road. What politicians must do on their part is the strengthening of dialogue and compromise. These are not just two words. This is a philosophy of the EU functioning and as such is of key importance for improving the overall political situation in BiH and for getting closer to the EU.

Politicians, these or some future ones, simply must understand that an agreement is the only way forward and that is has no alternative. Acting in such spirit requires a lot more effort, but it is more profitable long-term and brings the well-being for BiH. Political dialogue and compromise started in Prud must be continued, and even extended in order to get as wide as possible support in the Parliament and in the public for the light is at the end of the tunnel.

Sarajevo-x: You know very well the situation in the region and you have correctly noted that the economy of the RS is in the

lead in comparison with the Federation, for, simply speaking, the Federation is more expensive. There is the middle, cantonal, level that is taking up considerable means. How is it possible to make a balance between the two economies? What direction should property relations go, in your view?

Valentin Inzko: Effects of the world global economic crisis are becoming increasingly evident in the whole of BiH. All levels of government in BiH should take urgent and coordinated measures in order to alleviate consequences of that crisis. It is naïve to think and delude oneself that something that happens in the Federation of BiH does not affect the RS and vice versa. It is clear that all levels of government in BiH should take appropriate measures. I think that in your question you have tried to overly simplify a rather complicated political and administrative situation. I think that the best reply to this question is to simply increase incomes for all. In order to increase revenues, what's needed is the genuine unification of Bosnia and Herzegovina's economic space, greater orientation of policy towards investment attraction and creation of jobs. There is no great philosophy to it.

It should be completely clear that there cannot exist a success on the part of one entity and at the same time a failure on the part of the other entity. There is no prosperous Republika Srpska if the Federation is poor. Just as the Croatian prime minister Ivo Sanader said at the opening of the Mostar fair: "There is no prosperous Croatia if BiH is poor." It is in everyone's interest to live in a positive and prosperous environment.

Sarajevo-x: You stated also that the change of the Constitution would be the best evidence that there is a stable political situation in BiH given that only stable countries change the constitution. In what sense and direction should the Constitution be changed in your view?

Valentin Inzko: I also said that the change of the Constitution was not a condition for 5+2. I thought more in terms of the fact that the constitutional changes would show a kind of maturity of the overall BiH politics. Surely that neither I nor the international community will be giving the solutions, nor will I be commenting on individual proposals. Whatever constitutional solution is agreed, its aim must be to make Bosnia and Herzegovina more efficient and more compatible with the EU. Although the change of the constitution at this point is not a condition for progress in the process of European integration, I am sure that it will have to be changed. So, no one from the international community will be imposing solutions, but we are willing to help the process. The change of the Constitution may be exclusively carried out by a consensus of the three peoples and their political representatives. There is no other way.

Sarajevo-x: To what extent is the situation in BiH and the very slow dynamic of changes a product of a, objectively speaking, very complex context that includes consulting a huge number of parties for any concrete action. You yourself had to look for the support of the United States and go to Moscow after Brussels had given the green light?

Valentin Inzko: The fact is that BiH has a complicated and big administrative structure which quite surely affects the dynamics of reforms. But this does not mean that progress is impossible. On the contrary, some of the most demanding reforms were carried out precisely with this structure. So everything is possible when there is a good will for that. It was precisely why I said that any change of the Constitution must have as its result the increase of efficiency of BiH's functioning.

Sarajevo-x: Your predecessor got lost to a considerable extent in that maze of international relations towards BiH and

obstructions within the domestic political milieu. Are you sure that you can reconcile all these extremes and what is, in fact, your primary political goal when it comes to BiH?

Valentin Inzko: I enjoy the full support of the international community for my work in BiH. For the High Representative, this is an important prerequisite for a successful work. The second precondition is that a person who is carrying out this function knows well the situation in this country and wider region.

As to my goal, that is clear. The implementation of two conditions and five objectives set by the Peace Implementation Council with the aim of the transition of the OHR into the Office of the EU Special Representative is at the forefront. Long-term, my efforts will be concentrated on reforms that need to be implemented, and that constitute a part of the package of the European partnership. But, to reiterate again – politicians from BiH have the responsibility for this country, for the good and for the bad things. If they help me, they will help themselves. If, God forbid, they opt for a destructive behavior they will harm most their people and their country.

Sarajevo-x: Lately, you rarely miss to mention that you are a man from the border. It might be said that your life and career were built, in a way, in parallel with changes on the map of Europe.

Valentin Inzko: If you are ready for <?xml:namespace prefix = st1 />Europe, you have to prove that. The European Union has so far confirmed its commitment to BiH countless times. It is up to leaders of this country to show, by concrete actions, their commitment to the EU. BiH as a member of the EU – this is the unanimous position of the Union. The recent visit of foreign ministers of Czech Republic, Sweden and France respectively is yet another in a series of confirmations of the EU's commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sarajevo-x: You've said yourself that Europe, and also your country Austria, is tired of enlargement, but according to some polls on the participation of voters at the elections for the European Parliament and the level of confidence into European institutions, Europe looks like it is tired of Europe itself.

Valentin Inzko: Europe will resolve its institutional problems, that is not disputable, but this should not be an excuse to anyone here in BiH for the lack of implementation of reforms necessary for this country to get closer to the EU. The Lisbon agreement will, among other things, prepare the EU for the process of further enlargement, and this will quite surely be before BiH is in the position to become a full member.

Sarajevo-x: Your entry into the dressing room in which you expressed your congratulations to the players of the BiH representation team after the soccer match BiH-Belgium was seen as a touching move. On the other hand, part of the public was mildly surprised when they saw you in the Music production studio going to greet the band Regina that is representing BiH at the Eurovision song contest. Do you wish to show by this that politics should have its human, positive face that should not be shunned?

Valentin Inzko: My message is that politics is not the only essence of life or at least it should not be in a country that has so many talents and its own quality regardless of whether sport, art or science is in question. On the other hand, sport and culture have the integrating effect in a society. I do not doubt that in the right atmosphere in the country, these segments can also play a positive role both in strengthening the state and connecting people.