

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

Beta News Agency: In a brief time, following your work, the media have noticed that your policy is completely different than the one of your predecessors. (For example, you visited the Council of Ministers wearing a shawl with the BiH flag. You went to a match of the BiH team and cheered the players...) How important is it for the progress in this country to arouse a feeling of patriotism towards the state? Or are you indirectly trying to provoke exactly that, first among our politicians but also among the citizens?

Valentin Inzko: I am simply happy that BiH won that match, and with that result at that, and that shawl will certainly remain a dear souvenir and a nice memory for me. What I pointed out after the match is the fact that the most important successes are the ones you achieve on your own. For me that is the main message. You can win only when you play as a team.

As for patriotism, we can say whatever we like, but it is a very important personal feeling of each individual, something that in a way determines him or her. Sport and culture are areas that can help strengthen pride in one's homeland, in particular when good results are achieved. I think that here patriotism is often misinterpreted and used for political games. There are different kinds of patriotism and they can all be positive and not negative as some picture them. If you love your city, village, municipality, canton or entity, that is patriotism too. But that does not mean that you hate the others; hatred is not patriotism. It is logical that patriotism can contribute to progress: if you love your country, it is logical that you want it to move forward, to be

better and more beautiful, so that you can be proud of it. On the other hand, the state must also work on encouraging the feeling of patriotism among its citizens, so that they can be proud of it. And it has to do that by trying to secure jobs, good health care, good schools and universities, roads, by enabling them to feel comfortable in their own country.

Beta News Agency: What have been your conclusions at the beginning of your mandate in BiH? What is the “state” of BiH at the moment? Or, can BiH, as it is at the moment, expect to become a member in the EU any time soon?

Valentin Inzko: I believe that BiH has made some positive steps forward, and by that I mean the Prud process, the resolution of the status of Brčko, the beginning of the state property inventory, and other reforms. The political dialogue and compromise that started in Prud must continue; they should also be expanded to get a wider support in the Parliament and public. That process is very important because it is your own road of agreement and compromise. That is the only way to achieve progress. The people of BiH expect that.

As for EU membership and when BiH will join that club, that is a question for you in the first place. The process of European integration is in fact very simple. Meet the requirements, which are the same for all. So the rate of accession is up to you. One of the examples is Croatia, which started this process nearly at the same time as BiH, in 2000. Today, through its own efforts, it has become a member of NATO and is close to becoming a member of the EU. The European Union keeps saying that it is ready, and it has signed that as a part of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. BiH is expected to do the same as the other countries that wanted to become EU members. You are the ones who want to join and as soon as you meet the necessary requirements, the door to the EU will be open. I am ready to get engaged more for BiH to meet the requirements. As you know, I also hold the office of the EU

Special Representative for BiH.

Beta News Agency: Which is the first concrete problem or situation that you intend to resolve in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: My short-term priorities are directly linked with meeting the objectives and conditions (5+2) that the Peace Implementation Council set in order for the OHR mission to be transformed into the EUSR mission. In that context, finding an acceptable and sustainable solution for the distribution of state property is one of the remaining five objectives. With a recent decision of the BiH Council of Ministers on forming the Commission for Property Inventory the first important step was made, and it ensures that BiH has the property it needs to function more efficiently.

The inventory of property that starts with the decision of the Council of Ministers will serve as the basis for the inter-governmental agreement on state property. In parallel with these activities, the State Property Commission now needs to complete the Draft Law on State Property so that it can be adopted in the BiH Parliament. The resolution of this issue will show that the politicians of this country are prepared to find joint solutions and make decisions for the benefit of all citizens of BiH. I hope that the process will be completed as soon as possible.

As for long-term priorities, I believe that democracy cannot be built on empty stomachs. So it is crucial to initiate some significant economic activities. With regard to that I am prepared to do all I can to help.

Beta News Agency: Can the current politicians in BiH really lead BiH into the EU? In fact, what are your impressions – is the current political elite capable and does it want to overcome the burden of divisions, conflicts and disagreements?

Valentin Inzko: For me the Prud process, which is not perfect,

is nevertheless a clear signal that BiH is capable of finding home-made solutions for its problems. I wish the politicians in BiH would understand that dialogue and compromise are the key words for the prosperity of the whole country. You cannot make politics in the way that if you win something the other side has to lose something. On the contrary, you have to do all so that everybody wins.

After all, the EU, which BiH aspires to, is based on dialogue and compromise. Without it, it would be impossible to achieve anything. Just imagine if 27 architects were to build one building: each one of them would probably have his or her own design. But if everybody did only what suited him or her, the building would collapse even before it is built. That is something that all leaders in BiH should think about. If 27 different states can find a solution that suits everybody, I don't think it is impossible to achieve the same in BiH with three peoples.

Beta News Agency: In your assessment, what are currently the biggest problems that do not allow the progress of BiH towards Euro-Atlantic integration?

Valentin Inzko: The biggest problem is the slow rate at which things are done in BiH, even when it comes to merely technical things! How many months has it been since BiH remained without its leading person of the European Integration Directorate, for example? Why is BiH lagging behind when it comes to the printing of biometric passports? There are even more similar examples. And all of that represents unnecessary delays and a waste of time. Not a single question, not a single condition that BiH has to meet in order to move towards the EU will disappear if you ignore it! Sooner or later, regardless of how much you postpone it and avoid it, it will resurface, and that is why it is better to do it right away.

Beta News Agency: To which extent can the economic crisis

deepen the problems in BiH and the region? Do you think that the authorities in BiH have responded to recession adequately? Although that is not within your mandate, but will you maybe try to suggest some solutions in the field of economy and finances?

Valentin Inzko: It is quite certain that the world economic crisis will have its consequences in BiH too. All prognoses have shown that the crisis will come to Eastern Europe too, although that will happen with a delay. If your main trade partners and investors bear the consequences of global recession, you cannot expect them to import your goods or invest in your country as they have before.

The economy of BiH must be modernised as soon as possible and get ready for competition on the world market. In BiH there are many unused talents, great experts, also outside the country, who are only waiting for a chance to help the economic recovery of BiH with their own forces and their own knowledge. Give them the opportunity to return by removing administrative and other obstacles.

The SAA between BiH and the EU has shown the way. The legal solutions for all the main areas already exist at the European level, they only need to be adopted in BiH. More attention should be paid to that. The citizens of BiH expect their elected representatives to devote their attention primarily to economic progress. One should also talk about political and economic issues, but one should first strengthen the standard of citizens so that people know what they work for.

Beta News Agency: How do you view the fact that politicians in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina do not want the OHR to close, whereas the RS politicians do? Is BiH ready for the closure of the OHR? And is there a realistic possibility for new conflicts if the OHR is closed and NATO and EUFOR reduce their presence?

Valentin Inzko: Whether BiH is ready for OHR closure – that is something PIC will decide on the basis of its own assessments. That decision is in the hands of PIC and not of BiH politicians. I think that one should stop speculating about that topic and concentrate on the work that we have to do.

I don't think that there is a realistic possibility for a new conflict in BiH, nobody is interested in that any more. However, the international community keeps a watchful eye on the situation and it would be ready to react. There should be no doubt about that. What is needed today is for everybody to turn towards the future and not the past, which is there to be respected. BiH has a new priority, and that is the European Union, because it is a guarantee of stability, freedom of movement, investments, prosperity and normal life.