

Interview with High Representative Valentin Inzko

By: Dejan Jazvić

Večernji list: What is your comment on the current situation in BiH bearing in mind that Dodik called for Lagumdžija's resignation following BiH vote in favour of the latest UN General Assembly resolution on Syria. Dodik also announced that the six party agreements, including those on property and the reshuffling of authorities, will be suspended until the situation related to Lagumdžija's actions is resolved.

Valentin Inzko: First of all, let me say that I welcome the fact that BiH has remained consistent in calling for an end to the ongoing violence in Syria. Due to its principled positions on this and many other issues as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2010-2011 and as a member of the General Assembly, BiH has earned a great deal of respect from other members of the international community. The member states of the European Union have spoken with a single voice on this, as well.

We know that there are different views within BiH regarding the decision-making process related to the vote on the Syria UNGA Resolution. The Dayton Peace Agreement offers mechanisms for the resolution of such disagreements, if the parties choose to pursue them. Because such mechanisms exist, it would be a pity if political leaders allowed the current disagreements to lead to a breakdown in BiH's efforts to accelerate its progress toward the EU and NATO.

Večernji list: In BiH, and also wider, there are many of those who claim that the best solution for this country would be to convene a new international conference, a kind of „Dayton 2“. Do you agree with such assessments?

Valentin Inzko: Actually, the best solution would be for Bosnia and Herzegovina to emulate much of what Croatia has accomplished, particularly as regards Croatia's success in integrating with NATO and the EU. That is the goal we want to achieve, and certainly Croatia can be an excellent model and a helpful neighbour. Similarly, Bosnia and Herzegovina will change its constitution in the course of joining the European Union. Every EU country had to do it.

In the post-war period in BiH, we saw clear progress that began in 1997 and continued until 2005. During that time BiH was given the prospect of accession to the EU and membership of NATO.

Unfortunately, despite the opportunities offered by the Euro-Atlantic integration process, some of the country's politicians have, over the last six years, taken the easier option of revisiting the past, reverting to nationalist agendas and the politics of division rather than working towards the future. During that time, the political rhetoric became harsher, compromise more distant, with periods of a lack of dialogue on crucial issues and ultimately a misuse of the system.

Thus, the greatest challenge facing Bosnia and Herzegovina today is the full implementation of the Peace Agreement and all its annexes, which has brought peace and stability to BiH for over 15 years now. In parallel, the authorities need to deliver more efficient decision-making mechanisms that will create economic growth and jobs, fight crime and corruption and enable the country to move towards Euro-Atlantic institutions. These two processes are complementary and do not exclude each other. The last UN Security Council resolution on BiH was clear in this regard: it emphasized the importance of progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration on the basis of the Peace Agreement, while recognizing the importance of the country's transition to a functional, reform oriented, modern and democratic European country.

Večernji list: It is obvious that BiH has still not become a functional and self-sustainable country. How big is the responsibility of the international community for what goes on in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: The international community has clear responsibilities. The same is the case with me. My role as High Representative is to monitor the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to guide and coordinate the activities of the civilian organizations and agencies involved in assisting the parties to implement the Peace Agreement. Furthermore, under annex 10 of the Peace Agreement the High Representative is the final authority in theatre regarding the interpretation of civilian implementation of the Peace Agreement and in case of dispute I may give my interpretation and make recommendations as well as binding decisions as I judge necessary.

This said, the primary responsibility for the further successful implementation of the Peace Agreement lies with the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina themselves. The level of engagement by the international community will depend on the compliance with and active participation of all the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in implementing the Peace Agreement. This includes the establishment of a fully functioning and self-sustainable State, able to integrate itself into the European structures and facilitate the returns of refugees and displaced persons. These are also the views of the international community expressed in several UN Security resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Several years ago, as a consequence of the progress made at the time, the International Community adopted a less interventionist approach in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one that is focused in particular on the pull of EU integration and the benefits of NATO membership. By doing so, it has put elected representatives in the country to a test of their own capabilities. Integration into EU and NATO is a serious job

and requires a lot of effort. But this cannot be achieved by someone from outside. It has to come from within, it is the responsibility of local leaders to demonstrate the political will and prove to their citizens and BiH's international partners that they can indeed do the job for which they have been elected.

In my own country Austria, the Allied Forces stayed for ten years, from 1945 to 1955. When they saw that nazism would not come back, that democracy was firmly rooted and that the Marshal Plan and economy functioned, they withdrew. I see a similar scenario in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Once there will be sufficient progress in BiH the International Community will withdraw in its present configuration; but already now it is clear: There is less and less Dayton and more and more Brussels. This is how it should be.

Večernji list: Has the OHR fulfilled its mission in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: Unfortunately, my job is not yet done. With the support of the international community I still need to fully implement my mandate as spelled out in Annex 10 and as entrusted by the UN Security Council. In this regard, the goals and objectives set by the Peace Implementation Council back in 2008 need to be met. I say "unfortunately" for a reason: I would be much happier to announce the closure of the OHR as that would mean that BiH has overcome the current challenges and is irreversibly on the road to European Union and NATO membership. In light of recent developments, however, the international community is of the opinion that the presence of the OHR is still required to ensure that the Dayton Peace Agreement is respected and implemented.

Večernji list: Is there a unity within the international community when it comes to its position towards problems in BiH? Upon leaving BiH, some of your predecessors spoke about different positions of Europeans and Americans?

Valentin Inzko: Europeans and Americans share the same goal: they want to see BiH as a stable country and member of the European Union and NATO. For this to happen, BiH must have the capacity to agree solutions through dialogue among its politicians. There has never been any disagreement on this objective.

You may have also noted how strongly the United States are supporting the Euro-Atlantic integration of BiH. As far as closure of the OHR is concerned, it is not a secret that some like to see this happen rather earlier, others later, when conditions are met.

Večernji list: RS President, Milorad Dodik, often speaks about the unsustainability of BiH as a state. Is the dissolution of BiH one of the options that is considered in influential international circles?

Valentin Inzko: Dissolution cannot be considered because it is not an option. It is therefore a loss of time for political leaders and especially for the country to continue contesting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such problematic statements only call into question the commitment of senior officials of Republika Srpska to the constitutional order of Bosnia and Herzegovina which became member of the United Nations 20 years ago. Politicians should concentrate on important issues and work for the benefit all citizens, instead of raising tensions by challenging the integrity of the country.

Večernji list: Croats in BiH are extremely dissatisfied with their status, and the others more or less admit that. How can that unequal position of Croat people, established already in Dayton, be rectified? Are the current constitutional changes, related to the implementation of the „Sejdić i Finci“ case, an opportunity for that?

Valentin Inzko: I am very much aware of the frustrations felt

by many Croats living in BiH, and I have even expressed sympathies for some of these genuine frustrations. Many of us in the IC believe that a number of those frustrations have merit. Croats, Serbs, Bosniacs, together with all citizens of this country, have to feel comfortable in every part of BiH. Croats have to genuinely consider BiH as their home country [*domovina*]. Croats are one of constituent peoples of this country and could be a driving force for this country's European integration process. They could also be a fair mediator and facilitator between the Bosniacs and the Serbs, whenever this is being requested. As the numerically smallest of the constituent peoples, special care and attention should be given to the authentic needs and desires of the Croats.

In the Sejdic and Finci case the European Court of Human Rights dealt with direct discrimination of citizens of BiH who do not belong to any of the three constituent peoples. The implementation of the verdict is BiH's obligation that will not go away, no matter how long its implementation is delayed.

The Sejdic and Finci case is about the rights of the Jews and Roma; it is not about the Croats. It is about the huge number of minorities in BiH, about people from so-called mixed marriages or people who simply feel that they are *Bosnians* or *Herzegovinians* or even simpler – that they are just *citizens*. This, too, must be possible.

However, the Sejdic and Finci case could also be used for the Croats as an opportunity to improve their status. Why not? But at the moment it is foremost about the implementation of a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights.

Večernji list: Is it possible to reconcile the civil and the national [concept] in BiH, that even the SDP President, Zlatko Lagumdžija, is now talking about? What could that mean in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: BiH is not the only country in the world with different nationalities or minority groups. Collective rights

should not be an obstacle for the exercise of civic and other individual rights in a multiethnic State. It will always be a “gemisht”. Protection as a member of a group, but also full protection as a citizen – this can be reconciled and lived, as in Switzerland and elsewhere. There should be no excuse to discriminate minorities or to undermine state-building efforts, or ultimately for BiH to be a sustainable and prosperous State. Any proposal that will improve the efficiency of decision-making while ensuring an adequate balance between individual rights and the rights of constituent peoples is worth exploring. But let me also stress the following: Whenever politicians have chosen to operate in a constructive way they have been able to achieve significant progress even within the current rather complicated constitutional set-up and decision-making mechanism.

Večernji list: Croats in BiH criticize you over your last year's decision with which you practically facilitated formation of the Federation Government without the parties that received majority support of the Croat electorate. But even its main supporter, the SDP, has now given up on this Government. What is your comment on that?

Valentin Inzko: The decision I took last year, which I took with the **full** support of the IC, was the right thing to do. My intervention was necessitated by the then prevailing situation that would have harmed first and foremost ordinary citizens. Unfortunately, many people do not remember the situation at the time – e.g., politicians openly violating the constitution to prevent the establishment of parliamentary bodies like the Federation House of Peoples which had not been constituted for seven months; there were also two groups of officials claiming to represent the Federation; there were two Federation Presidents and two governments and there was the impending dissolution of the Federation Parliament with the very real prospect of a prolonged budget vacuum. Moreover, leading Croat parties had rejected an internationally-sanctioned compromise

solution that would have brought the crisis to an end. They thought that that compromise was a humiliation for them.

In this situation it was imperative for me to take a decision, to provide legal clarity and to preserve the stability and the functioning of the institutions of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the benefit of all its citizens.

Večernji list: The complicated decision-making system in BiH has blocked the initiated reshuffle of the government after the break-up of the SDP-SDA coalition. Are you going to react if the decisions of the Constitutional Court do not resolve this crisis of government at the Federation and State levels?

Valentin Inzko: The onus is on the political leaders and the democratic institutions to resolve the current situation in full respect of the rule of law and the Dayton Peace Agreement . As High Representative I remain the final authority in theatre regarding the interpretation of the civilian implementation of the Peace Settlement, and I am prepared to act should it prove necessary. It is my belief however that this is not the case at this time. There are domestic mechanisms, including the courts, which are fully capable of interpreting the constitution and laws, and settling disputes. Regardless of the current political disputes, the rule of law must be upheld. The institutions must function wholly in line with the constitution, laws, and agreed rules of procedure. At the same time, the judiciary must demonstrate that they have the capacity to resolve fairly and democratically the difficult questions pending before them.

Večernji list: Mostar has become a „case“ once again. Due to non-compliance with the decision of the Constitutional Court on the necessity to change election rules, local elections in this city have been postponed. How can this problem be resolved and are you going to react considering that the Statute of the City of Mostar is a product of the

international community?

Valentin Inzko: In the two years since the BiH Constitutional Court's ruling was first announced, domestic efforts to implement it have failed to deliver leaving Mostar's citizens unable to vote in local elections in October and facing the prospect of a legal vacuum in November. My office will now be increasing its role and facilitate talks aimed at a solution. The international community expects the parties to come to the table and to engage with each other in good faith in order to reach a solution.

Večernji list: Serbs and Croats in BiH manifest certain fears of a growing Turkish influence. Is it justified, bearing in mind public appearances of Turkish officials, such as Prime Minister Erdogan, who said that „Alija Izetbegović left Bosnia in his care“?

Valentin Inzko: I believe that such fears are ungrounded. Croatia, Serbia, Austria and Slovenia are the biggest investors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Turkey is, I think, around number ten. It has even withdrawn from BH Airlines. Turkey's economic ties with Serbia or Croatia and of course Russia are much, much bigger. With Russia, for example, the trade volume is more than 20 billion euros whereas Turkey's trade volume with BiH amounts to 346 million euros.

Over two million people with Bosnian roots live in Turkey, and it is only natural that Turks feel emotional bonds with Bosnia and Herzegovina. A recent development loan of 100 million euros from Turkey with incredibly good conditions is equally open to all citizens of BiH, to Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats.

Politically, Turkey is a respected member of the Peace Implementation Council and, as such, it has proved on numerous occasions that it is a valued partner of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on par with many other members of the international community.

Večernji list: The questions of the maritime border, construction of the Pelješac bridge and use of Ploče Port are on the agenda again. As an experienced diplomat, what would you suggest to the Zagreb and Sarajevo governments?

Valentin Inzko: I would suggest the obvious: sit and talk in order to find a solution that will benefit both countries. I sincerely think that a win-win situation is possible for both sides.

Večernji list: Is the Croatian entry in the EU going to have an impact on the situation in BiH and how?

Valentin Inzko: On 1 July next year, BiH will have a direct border with the European Union. I understand, however, that the EU rules will start to apply already on 1 January 2013 – in four and a half months! Many local officials and businesspeople throughout BiH are telling us how worried they are that their export markets will disappear and that ordinary people will suffer the consequences. In general, however, I hope that Croatia's success can provide a new stimulus for BiH's own efforts to become an EU member. Croatia is a tremendous example for the whole region that it can be done, even under most difficult conditions!

Večernji list: There are indications that the Croatian entry in the EU could lead to increased emigration, particularly of young Croats from BiH, who will look for their material security in the EU?

Valentin Inzko: Too many young people want to leave BiH, most for economic reasons. However, people are also leaving Imotski or other regions inside Croatia and go to Split or Zagreb.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has to do more for its younger generation, for their education and job opportunities. I wish that politicians here would focus more on this problem and ensure that the many thousands of bright, motivated young people with whom we interact will seek their futures here at

home. I am glad that they are so successful in Croatia or Austria, but they are missing in BiH. Therefore, conditions here have to change drastically for these gifted people to stay in their home country. How come that every citizen, if he or she is successful abroad, cannot repeat this success at home? Something must be wrong here.

Večernji list: BiH is at the end of the region when it comes to EU integration. People even make jokes about the EU falling apart before BiH becoming a member. How realistic is BiH's European perspective at all?

Valentin Inzko: Of course, BiH has a clear perspective of becoming a member of the European Union, but as said before, all is up to the leaders of this country. BiH has to fulfil the same technical and legal obligations as other candidate countries in the process, that's how it works. No country has entered the EU just by simply saying it wants to join. Every country had to successfully overcome the challenges of EU integration. The same process awaits BiH.

Since the arrival of Peter Sorensen, the EU Special Representative, last year BiH has got a much more focused vision for its future. Sorensen has opened new space for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the EU; he is not only supported BiH regarding the Corridor Vc highway, he is also building a „highway to Brussels“; he has recently developed and offered to BiH leaders a very concrete road map to Brussels. This has never been done before. BiH must just grab this opportunity and follow the offered road map. It is not late yet.

Večernji list: We know you spend your vacations at the Croatian Adriatic. Have you remained faithful to this tradition this summer as well?

Valentin Inzko: Yes, of course, like every other year, since 55 years. We started in Novigrad in Istria, but now I've been spending my vacation in Drvenik for 16 years. I don't feel

that I've been on vacation if I have not spent part of that time on the Adriatic. That is summer for me. The Adriatic Sea, this is the „oil“ of Croatia. But it is better. It is clean and renewable and close to the big tourist nations like Germans, Italians, Austrians, Czechs, Slovaks and Poles – and not to forget the very important customers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I hope the Croats will preserve this jewel and develop and treat it carefully.