

Interview with High Representative Valentin Inzko

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Dnevni avaz: You were again criticized in unison – not only by RS President Milorad Dodik but by the smaller entity, too, saying that you regularly present the situation in BiH before the UN as worse than it actually is. What would, in fact, happen if there were no more OHR in the country – would the country slip into conflict again?

Valentin Inzko: I would not overrate my own political strength and would not respond to hypothetical questions, either – what would happen if the international community were not in BiH any more. But I am certain it is still required in BiH. And with the structure that we currently have. We still have a European army, we have EUFOR, European police force and EU Special Representative and EU Head of Delegation Peter Sorensen. And we have the High Representative. I think this structure is required. And, of course, we all wish, particularly myself, for the international presence in BiH to be needed less and less.

Shelf life

Dnevni avaz: Yet, these BiH politicians are noticeably irritated over your extended stay in BiH. Can you say for how long and for what will the OHR's «shelf life» be extended?

Valentin Inzko: I have cited the example of my country many times – the Allied Forces liberated Austria and stayed for ten years. Until they were certain that Nazism would not return. And when they were certain that democracy consolidated itself, they decided to withdraw – only in 1955. This is a similar model I see for BiH, for the international community to

withdraw when we come to a point when things are irreversibly good and when Bosnia is on a certain path towards Brussels. And, as you know, two organizations are in Brussels – the European Community and NATO. But, BiH has already spent 16 years and, although everyone swears by Brussels, the factor of time on this road appears to have little meaning for many.

Dnevni avaz: You are accused of being like a doctor treating people from a disease that they do not have any more?! Dodik accused you for this in a letter to the UNSG Ban Ki-moon, suggesting that you invent work for yourself in Bosnia. What is your response to that?

Valentin Inzko: I would be happy if I ware the last High Representative, and I would be particularly happy if the High Representative were not needed at all. The Dayton Agreement is an agreement on peace, and the Constitution was agreed upon there only as an annex. The creators of Dayton were aware of this, that the Constitution was not perfect. For example, they forgot then to envisage the institution of the Supreme Court. And therefore, apart from Annex 4, which is the Constitution, Annex 10 was agreed, too. That is the one about the High Representative. I have my mandate and must implement it whether someone liked it or not.

Dnevni avaz: And will this stay as it is or you will change something?

Valentin Inzko: We can consider other models, too, but I think things will remain as they are for a foreseeable period, until the PIC member countries decide otherwise. They are, let's not forget that, the Steering Board, i.e. they manage the situation and in a way manage my work, too. But, I can tell you now from New York that it is not being considered for the time being.

Dnevni avaz: Since you mentioned your good relations with Belgrade, does it not seem to you that Dodik and Tadić play a

game of sorts – as they say in America – «good cop-bad cop», while in essence they do the same thing, where Dodik, although Bosnian, works more for or is inclined more to Serbia than BiH?

Valentin Inzko: I have known President Tadić for 29 years. I met him when I was a young diplomat in charge of press and culture, in 1982 in Belgrade, and then I met his family, too. I must say that all statements (about BiH, A/N) by President Tadić are constructive and fair. He does not find it hard to make such statements, e.g. Srebrenica Declaration, Istanbul Declaration, although he always suffers political loss in Serbia after that... When he was in Sarajevo last time visiting the house in which he was born and lived for six years, eight windows opened and all of them greeted him warmly. I think he has such feelings about Sarajevo. And President Dodik criticized Belgrade for its attitude towards Sarajevo.

Response to skeptics

Dnevni avaz: What is the answer to skeptics like me whether this strategy can help that the responsibility of BiH politicians evolves by itself for the better, and for Dodik to become «a Bosnian politically» at least?

Valentin Inzko: First of all I must say that some people or media in the Federation are really obsessed with Dodik. Of course, he often makes problematic statements. But, imagine one treated his wife in that way every day, giving her only negative comments – that marriage would not stand much chance. As regards Dodik, we would really like to see him use his positive talents, because, apart from the negative ones, he has these other talents. I told him that personally: he could be the locomotive for the whole region...

Dnevni avaz: Could he first be “a political Bosnian “?

Valentin Inzko: Yes! He could be that, too. He said once and he has repeated nice words about BiH in several occasions. For

example, regarding the IEBL he said once that it would not be perceptible in the future. He should be reminded of that! After all, he is a child raised near Kozara Mt., and his parents were antifascists.

Dnevni avaz: What are you going to talk about in Washington and is there any truth in media claims that America has been allegedly changing its relation towards Western Balkan?

Valentin Inzko: Except for lecture at John Hopkins University, I am going to meet with Deputy State Secretary William Burns, and I will also visit the national Security Council (in the White House, author's remark). As for America, I believe that State Secretary Hillary Clinton has a very interesting approach, by using "soft diplomacy", which was very successful globally and she uses it in a highly intelligent way. At the same time I notice more interest of the Obama's administration, especially of the State Secretary, since, at the end, she has emotional ties with BiH through her husband.

Dnevni avaz: What does make you say that?

Valentin Inzko: For example, last year, and this is just the time to remind about that, I believe it was October 18, Mrs. Clinton decided that, out of some 180 to 200 US Embassies worldwide, she would come and open the new US Embassy in Sarajevo. BiH must not forget that. Apparently, it was very important to her to open that particular Embassy. One should also remind of her meeting with the Bosniak, Serb and Croat youth in Sarajevo. She was really overjoyed with that gathering of some 400 young persons. I know also, reliably, that every time Hilary Clinton had a meeting with European or world leaders she asked how things were in BiH. The same applies to her interests in the State Department. I am very grateful to her that, despite all the problems, from Libya to Syria, and euro crisis, she finds time to keep her interest in BiH.

Dnevni avaz: Still, is that renewed US interest in BiH, going to change?

Valentin Inzko: I expect that continuity. And when it comes to Vice President Biden, do you remember his promise regarding the visit of then Deputy State Secretary Steinberg to Sarajevo? He came to BiH no less than six times; he was only in Japan, of all other countries in the world, that many times. These are the facts.

Bag full of criticism

Dnevni avaz: You arrived in the UN with a bag full of criticism over the absence of a political compromise in BiH. What can you do for this compromise to accelerate or for it to be achieved at a certain point of time?

Valentin Inzko: I singled out for the Security Council only some statements that were the most inappropriate, but I think the responsibility lies with the six parties, because they were mandated by their voters to agree and form a government. And BiH has been without a new government for 13 months now. Voters elected them to govern, not to talk only, and these six parties, therefore, have the most responsibility. I do have some signals, because I am in constant touch with the parties, and I think that something can move forward these very days.

Dnevni avaz: So, after your stay in the USA, you are more optimistic that when you return to Sarajevo you will find that concrete steps were made in order to form a government?

Valentin Inzko: It may sound cynical that I am an optimist after 13 months without a new government, but that is so.

Only BiH cannot protect itself

Dnevni avaz: Is the American Dayton to blame for this situation in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: Dayton, of course, brought peace – the war was ended. But, it is true that the constitutional structure is very complicated and expensive. That, however, was necessary. Alija Izetbegović wanted a state and it survived. Serbs wanted Republika Srpska and they got it. Croats wanted cantons and got them. There are many mechanisms here for everyone to protect themselves. These mechanisms are now, in a way, counter-productive, because there is a lot of abuse. It is only the BiH state that cannot protect itself.

Dnevni avaz: How can this be overcome at all?! With reforms only, such as implementation of the «Sejdić-Finci» case, or with some new «bosnianhood» even if it is only political in order to get out of this impasse into which BiH has been driven?

Valentin Inzko: It should be a good mix of individual and civil rights and rights of constituent peoples. One needs to make a fine mix of this. Everything should be normal in BiH, as is normal in, for example, in Poland, where there is a phenomenal example of Prime Minister Tusk, who is a representative of an ethnic minority, Kashubians, who are only about 200,000 among millions of Poles. And nobody minds that! You also have the Slovakian President who is of Croatian origin – Gašparović. Or, for instance, the former Slovakian President Schuster was a German. Citizens of BiH must be given the same chance as all others.