

Interview with HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko

Upon inauguration of the BiH Presidency you optimistically sent a message to the public here and around the world that a more positive political ambience had been created in BiH. The impression is that this is not the case at the moment. Or do you still believe that there is progress?

The October elections continue to be BiH's best chance for a fresh start. That was and remains my message despite all the difficulties in government formation. Citizens did their part and entrusted their vote to parties and individuals on 3rd October. Now those who gained that trust must justify it.

Political leaders need to put the voters' interests and the interests of the country as a whole above all else and formulate a majority that will be able to answer the challenges this country and its people face: a difficult economic situation, a low standard of living, stalled progress on Euro-Atlantic integration, the fight against organised crime and corruption. To be able to tackle these issues governments must be formed as soon as possible and start working immediately. There is no excuse for wasting time.

The number of analysts who believe that on the BiH political scene spite and accusations have occurred on all sides is not insignificant. Do you see this, and where can all this lead this country?

You do not have to be a genius to realise that "inat" politics, the road of spite and retribution, arrogance and ignorance, will lead the people of this country nowhere. In some cases the language used by politicians in the media and

in public discourse is so appalling that it does not warrant comment. I am sure that this is not what citizens voted for when they went to the ballot box; they gave their voice to improve their lives. Citizens would be better served if leaders focused on the economy, the rule of law and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Are you disappointed that there is not sincere and more frequent dialogue between Lagumdžija and Dodik, the leaders of the two strongest parties in the country? Even more so given that these parties are both of social-democratic orientation?

As I said many times before, dialogue is irreplaceable. That is the only way to make progress. In addition, confidence building should be strengthened, one of the most important factors in politics.

Our readers are situated mainly in areas where Croats live. That is why I am asking you, as an excellent connoisseur of political relations and the position of Croats, to say openly if you see the subordinate position of the least numerous people, do you see a possibility to rectify this position through the institutions. Is the Croat people perhaps a victim of some manipulation of the leading parties, the two HDZs?

There is general agreement that the position of Croats could be improved at the FBiH level. However, rather than me expressing my opinion I suggest that Croats look at what parties are offering in this regard and make up their own minds. I am ready to discuss any concern with them. At the same time, let me repeat once again that people in all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina expect better lives and future perspectives for themselves and their children in the first place. It is therefore much more about concrete policies for achieving these goals, which politicians should focus on.

If the political parties agree that the candidate for the Chair of the Council of Ministers should be from one of the two HDZ parties, would you be ready to lift the ban from exercising duties in the executive branch against Dragan Čović?

The decision prohibiting Dragan Covic from participating in the executive branch remains in force as long as circumstances do not change. At this point I would not speculate about what I may or may not do.

Let us leave aside the issue of government formation for now. It seems that two extremely important and sensitive political issues are coming to the surface, namely the issue of state property and more recently the status of the BiH Constitutional Court. Do you fear further confrontation, and are you ready to prevent or sanction that?

We are closely monitoring developments on the important issue of State Property. Any action to violate my Order of 5 January would be a clear deviation from the principle of rule of law. For example, if RS Courts moved to re-register state property, ignoring the order, it would be self-evident that the Judiciary was under political influence.

Another comment we have seen is that a new law is being prepared that would transfer responsibility for registry of land ownership from the Courts to the Geodetic Institute. First of all, I think it is worthwhile to note that such a Law was withdrawn by the RSNA in September last year precisely because it gave too much power to the Government in property registration. In any case, such a step would not affect my order, which prohibits any re-registration – by any authority – until the BiH Constitutional Court rules on this case. The International Community, with its broad and strong support,

has sent a clear message that there should be no re-registration of state property ownership until the competent State level institution, the BiH Constitutional Court, has had a chance to consider this case.

One of the more worrying public responses to this issue has been the assertion by some in the RS that if the BiH Constitutional Court comes to a decision which someone does not like, then the RS would simply ignore the decision of the court. The Constitutional Court of BiH is a cornerstone of the Dayton Peace Agreement, with Article 6 of Annex 4 (the BiH Constitution) clearly stating that the court “has exclusive jurisdiction to decide any dispute that arises between the Entities or between Bosnia and Herzegovina and an Entity or Entities.” The Court also has the authority to determine “whether any provision of an Entity’s constitution or law is consistent” with the BiH Constitution. The court’s decisions are final and binding and ignoring the Court decision would constitute a clear violation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

To return to the broader context of this issue, the International Community is not looking for a conflict with the RS; we believe this would be counterproductive and time would be better spent focusing on how to strengthen the economy and get the country back on the road to the EU. We respect the BiH Constitutional Court and its decisions and so should every politician in this country.

In the meantime, domestic political forces should come together to agree on apportionment of state property among the levels of government, as set out in the PIC’s first objective for OHR transition.

Do encroachments upon the judiciary and constant attempts to put this field under political supervision represent, in effect, efforts to prevent the war against crime and

corruption among political elites?

Threatening the judiciary and interfering in its work is against the rule of law and against the fundamental principles of functioning of a country. When you weaken the rule of law naturally criminality is reinforced and the fight against corruption weakened.

Only a day or two after the General Elections you stated very clearly that it is necessary to curb enthusiasm, because citizens and the new government will soon have to face the painful fact that there will be no money. For three months no one has even mentioned the IMF, and budgets can only be filled up or saved through the Stand-By Arrangement. Is this another illustration of the lack of seriousness on the part of political leaders?

Exactly, the real issues are economic issues. People need jobs; they need decent salaries, and an improved living standard. They need to make a living and that is what they voted for. Ignoring this is ignoring the honesty behind every vote that any party received. Citizens acted in good faith, so should political parties.

Taking everything into account, do you believe that overall progress is possible in BiH in this year?

I am convinced that it is possible. What we need is to form governments as quickly as possible, agree on priority projects and an agenda which can be implemented forcefully and swiftly with broad consensus. Yes it can be done, but it will require honesty, integrity and willingness to compromise from political leaders. This is the way to repay the trust voters gave to parties and individuals on 3 October.

