

Interview with HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko: BH is a sovereign country



Blic: What does OHR expect from the new government in BH? What do you concretely expect from Republika Srpska in the next four years?

Valentin Inzko: The elections, an improving regional environment and high level of European and international focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina offer support to BH leaders, who have an opportunity for a fresh start. They should seize it. No one wants a repeat of the last four years and I look to those who won the elections to take responsibility for the Republika Srpska and the country.

I must emphasize that the choice is theirs. Will the next four years bring dialogue and healthy compromises and with it reforms and the concrete results citizens want, jobs, justice and education? Or will party and personal interests be put first, dressed up as a defence of ethnic interests? We are about to find out. I repeat: your political leaders are about to make a choice about what the next four years will bring: progress or stagnation. We all know what the right choice is, and I hope that they also do.

In the short run, voters and the international community expect to see quick formation of the authorities at the state level. However, that government needs to be effective and

coalitions therefore must be based on an agreed plan.

This is not impossible; but it will demand realism, constructive compromise and political will. EU membership is ultimately the strongest motor, but also a guarantee of security and prosperity for all citizens of this country. All political leaders agree that they want a European future and this provides a sufficient basis upon which to agree a work plan.

BH's neighbours are firmly focused on getting to the EU as quickly as possible and are acting accordingly – BH cannot afford to be left behind, but it will be unless the incoming coalition works on the EU reform agenda 100%. Only if you are committed to delivering this agenda will you make progress. Past experience with other countries tells us that. Many may be sceptical but BH's success at agreeing the reforms required for visa liberalisation proves that Bosnia and Herzegovina can meet conditions, and that the EU is ready to reward BH for its efforts. If the incoming coalition puts the interests of ordinary citizens first, then I assure you there can be a great deal of progress and that it can be made very quickly. I strongly believe that if this country works as one that you can make rapid progress. I believe that the incoming coalition must recognise this at the outset.

Those who enter the new government are entering a team by their own choice and thus have a common responsibility. The days when those who are in the government could behave as if they are in opposition to the government are over. The political parties know all too well that the levels of unemployment and poverty mean that people simply will not accept this any longer.

Blic: How realistic is the closure of OHR after the latest PIC session?

Valentin Inzko: OHR will close when the five objectives and two conditions are met in full. It is as simple as that. Delivering this is the responsibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political leaders and institutions, not the OHR or the International Community.

What is required is clear and quite frankly very straight forward. They know what they need to do and they need to get on with it. What is missing is the political will to agree and implement reform. What puzzles me is that the leaders calling most loudly for OHR to close are the same leaders taking steps to further block progress on the five objectives.

Blic: Why does the international community claim that it means helping Bosnia and Herzegovina if OHR stays here? What are the arguments for such a claim?

Inzko: Over the last four years we have witnessed a continuation of the war by other means; some question the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and threaten secession, some want further territorial division and a few have called for a centralised State. None of this is the direction Dayton will take. Dayton has brought peace and laid the foundation for lasting stability and dignified living standards, but to fully realize these ideals the country must reform. We all know this. OHR has helped the country come a long way, and as BH made progress our role evolved accordingly, and so it should. We will not deliver the reforms in place of the elected officials of this country. There is no serious politician in this country who believes that OHR is going to deliver their political agenda for them. However, OHR is here and as long as it is we will continue to facilitate progress where we can. What the citizens of this country can be absolutely assured of is that I take my core responsibility very seriously and I will uphold the Peace Agreement should anyone seek to challenge it. I hope that the important work

that OHR does on both of these fronts will also help to provide the reassurance that some politicians need in order to start talking to each other and reaching agreements. And finally, we must not forget that OHR is a part of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Blic: Why did you not personally show a minimum of human dignity during the hunger strike of the former RS Police Director, Dragomir Andan? Why did you ignore him?

Valentin Inzko: Mr. Andan was not ignored. The fact is that even before his action I had been in contact with Mr. Andan several times, so he was aware of the position of the OHR and the International Community and my own commitment to review these decisions regularly. Despite this he chose to go ahead with his protest, but that was his decision and his decision alone.

Blic: Andan's case is a classic example of violation of human rights by OHR. What is the basis for your claim that the people in BH and the government are the only ones responsible for the situation in the country? It is clear that most of the things cannot be changed while OHR is in BH.

Valentin Inzko: I don't agree. Decisions of my predecessors have been referred to the courts and to international judicial institutions and in each case these institutions have recognised them as necessary measures. You will also be aware that there is an ongoing process and that over the last few years scores of previously removed officials have had the terms of their bans lifted.

Blic: Is BH a protectorate? If you claim that it is not,

please explain that to us.

Valentin Inzko: BiH is not a protectorate, it works in partnership with the international community. It is a sovereign, internationally recognised country since 1992, with its own constitutional system and all other statehood characteristics, BiH is a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and will take on the Chairmanship of the UN Security Council in a matter of weeks. In Bosnia and Herzegovina you hold your own elections and have your own judicial institutions. BiH is a country that has signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union and has a Membership Action Plan agreed with NATO. If it was a protectorate, all this would not be possible. What is more, over the last 15 years the overwhelming majority of decisions at all levels have been taken by the local authorities and not by the international community, despite claims by some politicians that the country is a protectorate where the international community has imposed everything. Take the examples of defence, indirect tax, judicial and electricity reforms that we have seen challenged over the last few years. All these laws were enacted not by the High Representative but by those same parties that now attack them! Many of these reforms were instrumental in enabling Bosnia and Herzegovina to progress towards EU and NATO membership. Neither EU nor NATO are going to take a country seriously for membership if its politicians are talking about rolling back previous reforms rather than moving ahead with future reforms. My message to political leaders is always the same: look forward not backwards.

Blic: Is closing of OHR a condition for submitting the application for candidacy status of BiH in EU?

Valentin Inzko: You have seen the recent comments made by Commissioner Füle in regard to this question and the Progress

Report adopted by the European Commission on November 9. I have nothing to add except to say that the reason why BiH did not become a candidate country in the last four years is because the ruling coalition failed to deliver the necessary reforms; not because of the presence of OHR. Progress on the EU path is very straight forward – deliver the requirements set by the EU. I hope that in the next four years we will have a coalition that understands this.

Blic: Why did not you still respond to the RS Government, which is asking help in constituting the commission for demarcation of the inter-entity boundary line? Will you get involved?

Valentin Inzko: I have received the letter from the RS authorities in which they explain why they believe that precise description and demarcation of the IEBL is needed. I will be replying to the letter soon. In short, the Dayton Peace Agreement covers IEBL demarcation in Annex II and clearly defines this as an issue foremost between the parties and with the involvement of the commander of the international forces in BiH, currently EUFOR and NATO. Annex 2, just like all Dayton's Annexes, must be adhered to fully and it clearly says that no unilateral action, by either party, can be taken. To do so would be a serious violation of Dayton indeed.

Blic: What is the manner that OHR will contribute to the economic recovery of the country?

Valentin Inzko: When the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council met in Sarajevo last week they agreed with representatives of Civil Society that measures to address the economic downturn in the country were desperately needed. I firmly believe that the real solution to Bosnia and Herzegovina's devastating economic situation is to implement

long-delayed economic reforms, but we cannot do it for you, although we will consider how to facilitate progress wherever we can. What has worked in other transition countries can work in BiH too and this will be the main focus of my discussions with Prime Minister elect Džombić. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small country facing numerous economic and social challenges; it must work cohesively if the situation is to be improved. It simply cannot afford to be riddled with division and this applies as much to the economy as it does to other areas.

BiH and its Entities need to start feeling the benefits of reforms that are in place, but they also need to press ahead with deeper reform. Whether this happens in the next four years is in the hands of the incoming coalitions.

The Entities have been taking money from the international financial institutions and the fact that this funding is available is welcome. But BiH also has its own money; for example, many millions KM are blocked on the Elektroprivreda BiH account, which should be used for infrastructure development. I think this would be in the interest of both Entities and all peoples in BiH. Similarly, there are over 17 million KM that have accumulated from road tolls. This money is also being held on the account instead of being used for road construction when in fact we have many road building projects in both the RS and the FBiH. There seems little sense in this so I hope that soon we'll see agreement that will allow the allocation of these revenues.

What we all want to see is the growing economy, more jobs, and thereby more hope and optimism for citizens.