

Nezavisne novine: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



By Dejan Šajinović

Nezavisne novine: How do you comment the verdicts issued against Radovan Karadžić and Vojislav Šešelj? In your opinion, has the Hague Tribunal contributed to the reconciliation in former Yugoslavia?

Valentin Inzko: I strongly believe that without truth and justice reconciliation and healing is impossible. Also, to reach the truth and justice is our debt to the victims and the last thing we can do to make them rest in peace. I must confess that I am worried about how long it is taking, but I remain confident that eventually all individuals responsible for inflicting suffering in violation of international humanitarian law will be convicted for their crimes. We must be clear, there are no good or bad peoples. The criminal responsibility lies with those individuals who committed the crimes. There is no collective guilt, but also no collective innocence.

I have to tell you that, as a human being, I am disappointed with the fact that there are still some people who choose not to look truth in the eye, who glorify war criminals and relativize evil. I feel sorry for them because in doing this they have taken on the burden of disqualifying themselves from the civilized world. It is not only that they reopen the wounds of the victims. They also send the wrong message to

young people. Instead of working to make their future brighter, they try to keep them locked in what probably is the darkest time in this country's history. No one can change the past but everyone can learn from it.

Nezavsine novine: In your opinion, what effects will these verdicts have on the regional relations?

Valentin Inzko: I hope that the effect of these verdicts will be only a hiccup in what has been a generally positive period for regional cooperation. Yes, we have seen some heated statements, but these are blips. The trend is positive.. This tragic chapter of the region's history has to be put behind us and we must turn to the future. If we do this, then this region will be a place where young people want to stay. If we don't they will continue to leave and that is a trend that no country in the region can afford to continue.

Encouraging messages have been coming from regional leaders, from Croatian President Grabar-Kitarovic, from Serbian Prime Minister Vucic and from the BiH Presidency members. After all the recent tensions, that is what we need to see: a strong commitment to peace, good neighborly relations and improved cooperation in all spheres, whether it be economy or culture.

Nezavsine novine: What is the best solution for the city of Mostar and what is going to happen if the elections do not take place in Mostar once again?

Valentin Inzko: I know what Mostarians expect and they are right to do so. They expect to cast their ballots at the same time as other citizens of their country in this year's local elections. It is up to the political leaders to ensure that an agreement is finally reached that implements the BiH Constitutional Court's ruling and enables voters to elect their local representatives in October.

Our message is clear: the international community will not support the division of Mostar.

As the PIC Steering Board has repeatedly made clear, Mostar must remain a single, coherent, multi-ethnic unit of local self-government, with some level of local authority/administration below that of the city

SDA, HDZBiH and all other political parties involved in the effort to implement the Court's ruling must finally meet this obligation. They must now intensify their dialogue and adopt the necessary legislative changes.

The BiH Central Election Commission is to announce local elections soon and I want to believe that a solution will be found that will finally enable the citizens of Mostar to elect their local representatives.

Nezavsine novine: Will the Sejdic-Finci decision be implemented by the next general elections?

Valentin Inzko: It has to be addressed! More than six years have passed since the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case "Sejdic-Finci vs. BiH.

Implementation of this decision remains this country's obligation and – as I said countless times before – it will not disappear. It is simply unacceptable that so many years after Strasburg concludes that a group of people are systematically discriminated against nothing has been done.

Of course I understand that at the moment, the immediate priority of BiH is to advance the Reform Agenda, but this issue remains and will need to be addressed in the not too distant future. Whether it will happen before the next elections, we shall see. I would certainly hope so.

In my opinion, the implementation of the Sejdic-Finci ruling would benefit everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it represents a clear basis on which to protect and promote one of most cherished European values – diversity.

By implementing this decision properly, leaders of BiH would send a strong signal that the country has matured, that all its citizens have the same rights and discrimination has no place in its interwoven fabric. It would also show that BiH is ready to reembrace and reestablish the values for which it was once known.

Nezavsine novine: Which conditions and objectives out of 5+2 Agenda for the OHR closure remain unfulfilled?

Valentin Inzko: As you know, I am supposed to submit the 49th report to the UN Security Council later this month and in that report, I will speak in detail about the progress achieved on implementation of the five plus two agenda necessary for the closure of the OHR.

For the time being, let me just say that the progress toward meeting the outstanding objectives has been limited and that the authorities in BiH are not close to completing the job. I must be frank, as long as we see open challenges to the Peace Agreement I don't see how the PIC Steering Board is going to be put in a position that it can agree to close the OHR. So the message is very simple, if you want to close the OHR stop challenging the Peace Agreement! It is quite simple really.

Nezavsine novine: Has the international community "tied the hands" of the OHR, in one way or another?

Valentin Inzko: I often hear people use this phrase. I always give the same explanation: although my mandate remains the same, the role of the High Representative and the OHR has evolved over the years. The change of approach was initiated intentionally by the international community so BiH can reach a point where it no longer needs a High Representative. The country is going in that direction, but this is a process and not an event. I will be the first to welcome the announcement that the process of transition is over and the OHR can close, but we are not there yet.

Many people still expect the High Representative to step in and make decision when politicians reach a deadlock but that is an approach that we will not return to. To be honest, even some politicians who loudly request OHR's closure would be more than happy to leave responsibility for certain decisions in the hands of OHR. We are moving beyond this and this is the right direction. I will continue to uphold the Peace Agreement and facilitate efforts to resolve issues, but it is not the job of the High Representative to act in place of elected leaders. They are in the driving seat now and they have to steer the wheel and deliver. The spotlight is on them. They were selected by the voters to do a job. They are responsible for the situation that prevails in the country. This is how it should be in 2016.

Nezavsine novine: What is your relationship with President Dodik?

Valentin Inzko: It is professional, factual, as with any other elected leader. Naturally, we have different views on many issues, but that does not prevent us from having correct and professional relations.