

Nezavisne novine: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Nihada Hasić

The High Representative Valentin Inzko assures that the burning of government buildings during the protest of citizens in the FBiH was not a coup, even though several political parties believe it was.

“What is at threat are the political careers of those politicians in the institutions who have been deaf to the legitimate frustrations of the citizens for far too long and prevented the institutions from dealing with issues of corruption, economic development and creating jobs for people besides politicians and their family and friends,” Inzko said, noting that protests cannot be used to change the constitutional structure of BiH and that „political leaders who are talking about break up of the country are simply not serious.“

“The ongoing demonstrations have happened for a clear reason, and they should be an alarm bell – loud and clear. The priority must be to address socio-economic and political reforms, which are in the interest of the citizens. The priority must also be to address conditions which would enable BiH to move forward on the Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. Advancing on that agenda will bring further reforms that will create better conditions for all. The leaders throughout the country should listen to the people’s outcry for a better life. The frustration and grievances of the citizens are similar all over the country,” the High Representative said.

Nezavisne novine: Mr Inzko, after several government buildings were burnt down during the protests, many political parties warned that this was a coup d’état. In your opinion, is the government system in the F BiH currently under threat –

including BiH, too, because the CoM BiH and the BiH Parliament do not meet either?

Valentin Inzko: No, this was not a coup attempt. The institutions themselves are not under threat. The institutions must function. I condemn the violence committed by small groups on the first Friday of the demonstrations about two weeks ago. Violence against protesters, police, journalists, and public property, where we even saw some buildings burning, is not acceptable, but it is now up to the relevant authorities to look into this issue and take the necessary action in a manner that is consistent with the law. I make a distinction between the few protesters who committed acts of violence at the beginning of the protests and the vast majority of protesters who have assembled peacefully over the last two weeks to make their legitimate frustrations and expectations known to the authorities. There are clear underlying reasons for the protests and they must be acted upon.

The presidency has continued to work and I welcome the announcement that the BiH House of Representatives will return to work next week. I expect that all institutions will continue or soon resume working in full capacity with the aim of addressing the many outstanding reforms. In this context, I welcome the decision of Presidency member Radmanovic and some other officials from Republika Srpska to continue working in the institutions as they normally do. This is an example others should follow.

The fact that some have called for constitutional changes should not be perceived by anyone as a threat. The demonstrations cannot by themselves lead to changes to the constitutional set-up of the Federation and its Cantons or to the structure of BiH as a whole. Such changes can only come about through the legislative process to amend constitutions, where all sides are included and certain protections exist. Unilateral changes to the internal structures of this country

are not possible. In addition, let me be crystal clear that the international community remains absolutely committed to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nezavisne novine: Did the local political factors ask for an OHR intervention to help overcome the current problems in light of the requests to remove cantonal government, administer extraordinary elections and over the absence of the Parliament and CoM sessions?

Valentin Inzko: The increased activity of citizens in making concrete demands of the people they elected is very positive and shows that the citizens in the country are holding their political leaders responsible for the long-standing problems in the country. The recent events also show the need for a vibrant civil society and I hope that political leaders throughout the country will support the further reinforcement of this sector. This is a clear sign of a democracy. Citizens will have a chance to express their views on how well various officials and parties responded to their requests when they vote in October.

In this context, let me use this opportunity to say something to the elected officials of this country: this is your country, you have placed your names on the electoral lists, you made pledges and promises to the people. Now you need to start delivering! You have for far too long focused on your personal and party interests and what you have sought to portray as ethnic agendas without much consideration given to the country and the concrete needs of the citizens. It is time for you to remember that public service is a privilege, not a right, and you have an obligation to the citizens who elected you, not to the party bosses who placed you on the list.

Extraordinary elections for a full term of four years are not possible under the current BiH Constitution and would require substantial changes to the legal framework. The proposal that

the BiH Parliamentary Assembly would be able to call for extraordinary elections at all levels raises a number of questions under the current constitutional framework in BiH. I believe that that the parties from Republika Srpska rightly argue that the BiH Parliamentary Assembly cannot pass legislation that would allow it to dissolve lower-level legislatures.

Nezavisne novine: Due to constant political conflicts in the F BiH, which have persisted since the 2010 election, do you consider yourself also responsible for the situation in this part of BiH because the PIC, in 2011, annulled the decision of the CEC which had ruled that the Federation officials were appointed illegally, and it was them who appointed the Federation Government, the removal of which is now requested by the citizens?

Valentin Inzko: Everybody knows what preceded my 2011 decision. The HDZ parties obstructed for more than six months the appointments to the Federation House of Peoples, and certain political leaders clearly showed no willingness to play a constructive role in getting the authorities in place in the Federation. Furthermore, there was also legal ambiguity as in one moment there were two Federation Governments arguing that they were each in charge.

As always, the easiest way for the political parties and the authorities to avoid responsibility for their actions to prevent the proper functioning of institutions is to blame the OHR and me as the High Representative for the problems in the country.

However, as we have seen during the ongoing protests, the demonstrators are holding the relevant authorities and the national political leaders responsible. Again I repeat that the politicians all over the country must take these demands seriously. Blaming the international community, another ethnic group or other political parties does not work anymore. The

citizens, also in Republika Srpska, see through this agenda and everybody wants a change, with more focus on addressing the socio-economic problems. I am sure that in BiH, as elsewhere, the citizens will hold their elected political leaders accountable and make choices in the elections about which parties and individuals can best represent them and their views. This is how democracy works and we want to see it as part of the political culture in BiH as well.

Nezavisne novine: EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle said that he was withdrawing from the „Sejdic-Finci“ negotiations due to a failure of BiH politicians to agree on this new condition for advancement towards the EU. Is there any progress by the politicians on the subject of meeting the conditions for the closure of the OHR?

Valentin Inzko: Commissioner Füle and the entire EU Delegation in BiH made huge efforts to have an agreement that would enable BiH to move forward on the EU agenda. It is very unfortunate that seven political leaders have missed the chance to take BiH forward towards European Union membership by failing to agree on the implementation of the Sejdic-Finci judgment. As the Commissioner said, the responsibility lies with them.

As with the EU integration process, we have equally seen very little progress on addressing the conditions which have been set for OHR's closure. In this context, nothing new has happened since the latest session of the Peace Implementation Council in December last year, when the PIC Steering Board expressed concern about the continued lack of progress on the 5+2 agenda.

This is especially true in the case of state and defense property. The Constitutional Court decision on this issue clearly says that the State of BiH is the original titleholder of this property under Dayton, and that the State must consider the needs of the entities when managing this

property. Any solution must be in line with the court's ruling, having in mind that, according to Dayton, the rulings of the BiH Constitutional Court are final and binding. Again the responsibility is clearly with the authorities and politicians in BiH to develop a solution in line with this decision.

Nezavisne novine: Since the „ownership by local politicians in BiH“ does not go smoothly, are the international institutions going to have to engage more in BiH or they will continue sending calls for an internal agreement and criticize the „irresponsible leaders“ from a distance?

Valentin Inzko: The International Community can help, but the main responsibility lies with BiH and its leaders. As a result of the ongoing demonstrations, we have seen an increased attention towards BiH, not only from the EU, but also from other members of the international community. This attention sends a clear message that the international community cares about BiH and is ready to help the citizens and the authorities to find solutions to the ongoing problems.

It is now the responsibility of all the authorities and leaders in this country to take action to solve the long-standing and well known problems in the country, especially in fighting corruption, strengthening the economy, and creating jobs.

In this context, let me use this opportunity to say that vital national interests are indeed important but from the perspective of ordinary people, everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina shares the same vital economic interest, an interest in leading a normal, dignified, productive life.