

Nin: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko



By Branislav Božić

NIN: Are you aware that many Serbs are quite angry with you?

I am aware of this. And I am bothered. Last year I already received 5.000 postcards paid for by the SNSD youth with a message "Inzko go home". Some twenty postcards even contained death threats.

I am aware that my recent remark was misinterpreted, that it has offended some people, and for that I am sorry, especially since it was never my intention.

I am also aware that my insistence on full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement does not make me a favourite among the RS political establishment, and in a few other circles. But to claim that I had intentionally aimed to offend Serbs is ludicrous. That is nothing more than mere politicking.

I respect the Serb people. I spent four happy years of my life in Belgrade. As a person, I greatly cherish the fact that in 1986 I became one of the first benefactors of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade. Patriarch German called me and personally presented me with a diploma declaring me a Ktitor. I am also a benefactor of the Orthodox Church in New York City that was destroyed by fire, and the demolished Orthodox Church which is currently under reconstruction in Mostar. Of course, I have also contributed to the rebuilding of demolished

Catholic churches and mosques.

Nin: Are you going to apologize, since you were asked to do so by the moderate, and some less moderate Serb politicians?

I will not apologize to any politicians. My statement was misrepresented. I even said “no one is even thinking about it.” However, holidays should not be celebrated in a way that is provocative, offensive to others, and outside the bounds of the Dayton Peace Agreement. I also said that political leaders need to look towards the future and into the past.

Marking of historic events must be done in the spirit of a dignified memorial culture. And this should be true everywhere. For example, in Austria, the 27th of January is not only marked as Mozart’s birthday, but also the day of the liberation of Auschwitz and the day of Holocaust remembrance. I would add – of all holocausts and all genocides.

In my homeland of Austria, as the new President Alexander van der Belen has said, this was one of the darkest pages in our history.

Every nation has dark pages in their history that need to be faced with. But there are no bad peoples. There are only bad individuals, and bad policies. Not bad peoples.

Nin: Have you received a letter from the Association “Jasenovac – Donja Gradina”? Their membership includes people whose families were interned or perished in the genocide committed by the Independent State of Croatia against Serbs, Jews and Roma. Are you going to reply, and will you apologize to them?

Yes, I have received the letter. If anyone has wrongly understood my statement, I am truly sorry.

I deeply sympathise with the victims of National-Socialism, fascism, communism, or any other dictatorship. This naturally

applies also to victims of concentration camps in the Independent State of Croatia.

A few years ago I attended a commemoration dedicated to Jasenovac-Donja Gradina Concentration Camp. All I have to say is: such horrors committed in the name of an ideology, anywhere in the world, must never be forgotten! Regretfully, the region is full of sites where concentration camps, both old and new ones, existed.

Nin: Are the authorities in Banja Luka correct in claiming that you are pursuing a pro-Bosniak policy, and that you always take the side of political Sarajevo?

Serbia was a party to the Dayton Peace Agreement, and the RS also signed a number of annexes to the Agreement. I am simply overseeing the implementation of something that was agreed upon.

This includes the decisions of the Constitutional Court which are "final and binding."

The Constitution also provides for the presence of three international judges in the Constitutional Court, which President Milosevic signed in Dayton. It also stipulates that the entities must comply with the decisions of the Constitutional Court. Dayton is not an "a la carte" menu. The Peace Agreement leaves no room for the entities to secede. This is something that everyone has signed up to.

So, when the RS officials, foremost the President of the RS, call for the exact opposite of what was agreed upon, when they refuse to respect the decisions of the Constitutional Court that they do not like, when they say that Bosnia and Herzegovina is an artificial creation and that the RS should secede, I must react.

My reaction is the same to any violation of the Constitution, regardless of whether the culprits are Bosniaks, Croats or

Serbs.

You should keep in mind that I tend to align my views with those of the Peace Implementation Council members. I practically had the support of all countries but one for all my decisions.

Which country is withholding its support?

Russia sometimes excludes its opinion, but not always.

Nin: The original Dayton has seen significant changes. Some competencies have been transferred from the entities to the level of BiH. To what extent is it a creation of the International Community, and how much of it resulted from an agreement among local political elites?

Everything was done in compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement, and with general consent of local leaders. Of course, the International Community's engagement after the war was more robust and omnipresent. Since then the role of the International Community has evolved. We are letting local leaders work on resolving issues. After all, that is what they were elected to do.

Bosnia and Herzegovina should stand on its own feet in every respect. And as such, it should be moving towards its proclaimed objective – membership in the European Union.

Nin: For some time the RS President, Milorad Dodik, has been saying all sorts of things about you, even going as far as to declare you an "international criminal." And that you are here just to keep your high salary ? How do you react to that?

You are not the first to ask me this question, and I will respond the same way I did to other journalists. To quote Miroslav Krleža: "When talking about others, we reveal ourselves." My salary is not paid by the RS, but by the EU, USA, Japan and other countries. It has remained unchanged

since Carl Bildt. I even lowered it and it is lower than claimed. I am willing to switch with the President of the RS. Even if I would work free of charge, it would not change anything.

Nin: In the past, after the end of the war when you served as Austria's Ambassador to BiH, it appeared as though the relationship between the two of you extended beyond the official protocol. There was more closeness than what is usually expected in diplomatic practice. What changed?

Many things have changed. Our relations were good and we were on a first-name basis. Dodik is a child of respectable antifascists from Kozara region, and the West viewed him with great hope.

Not so long ago, Mr. Dodik's policies were different, aimed towards reconciliation and a common future. He was the one who said that Karadzic and Mladic should be extradited to the Hague. He was the one who said back in December 2007 that genocide was committed in Srebrenica. He was probably reflecting on the statement by General Mladić, made in the Assembly of the "Republic of the Serb People of BiH" in the Army Hall in Banja Luka on May 12, 1992. He said: "Mr. Krajišnik, Mr. Karadžić, how do you expect us to explain this (ethnic cleansing) to the world? For heaven's sake, this is genocide."

Dodik's popularity was sky-high, and he was seen as a respected and desired partner. He was constantly travelling to major capitals of Europe.

They saw him as a man capable of giving not only the RS, but BiH as a whole, a strong push forward. In my view, Milorad Dodik could have been Willy Brandt of the Balkans.

I would rather not speculate on what led to a change in his policies. Only he knows the answer to that.

There is a Native American proverb which states that every person contains within them a good wolf and a bad wolf. The one you feed the most will be the one that prevails

I have said it many times, and I shall say it again – a tremendous political talent is being misused in a wrong direction. I am truly sorry because of that.

Nin: What are your obligations in relation to the US sanctions against Dodik? Or it does not affect you?

The sanctions imposed by the United States against the RS President in no way affect the mandate of the High Representative. This mandate remains unchanged, and I still have at my disposal all the instruments necessary to uphold the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Nin: There are indications about the imminent closing of the OHR. When do you expect your Office to be closed?

The conditions for the closing of the OHR, better known as the "5+2 agenda," were set in February 2008. I report to the UN Security Council on a semi-annual basis about the progress in meeting these conditions. The assessment on the ultimate completion of these conditions will be made by the Peace Implementation Council. The second condition is of particular relevance: "A positive assessment of the situation in BiH based on full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement." You can make your own guess whether we have arrived at this aim. I think some people who want the OHR to be closed are in fact doing everything to extend its mandate.

Nin: How do you see BiH in the future? Will the creation born in Dayton endure? Will be more politically stable and economically developed? Will it get closer to the EU?

We have to be patient and give the country a chance, but Bosnia and Herzegovina will surely continue to exist as an internationally recognized sovereign state.

We spend too much time talking about the past. I sincerely wish if we could work on matters that are essential – the rule of law, the fight against corruption, the economy, the job market, the brain drain among young people, and ways to curb this negative trend. The issues which were on the agenda recently between PM Vucic and Chair of the CoM Zvizdic. That was one of the most important and successful meetings recently.

Furthermore, my faith lies with talented people among all three peoples in BiH. I believe that, with a little good will, people here can have a good life. In fact, you have a saying – a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Nin: Are the key processes in BiH defined by your Office, and others under the umbrella term of the International Community, or are they defined by the local political elites?

The political elites are the ones setting the dynamics – in both the positive and the negative sense. This is especially true for the EU integration process. The membership application was not submitted by the OHR or the International Community. It was done by Bosnia and Herzegovina. And surely this is something we also want to see – less Dayton and more Brussels. In fact, we have proven this by reducing the presence of the OHR. During the mandate of my predecessor, Paddy Ashdown, the OHR's staff numbered more than 800 people. Now there are about a hundred.

Nin: Does the International Community feel responsible for the deterioration of the political environment in BiH and the diminishing trust between ethnic groups? What can be done about this?

I do not shy away from acknowledging that the International Community bears some of the responsibility. But you must always keep in mind that someone cannot be helped against their will. The responsibility primarily lies on the people

elected to run the country, including those at the entity and cantonal levels. They took an oath and made promises to the voters. But it seems people are satisfied with the politicians who represent them, as they repeatedly vote for the same people and the same parties.

Nin: Is there a new, younger generation of politicians capable of creating a different atmosphere?

Over the past eight years in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also during my time as the Austrian Ambassador, I got to meet many fantastic people, with great kindness and talent, from Banja Luka to Sarajevo and Mostar. They all want the same thing, a normal, predictable future, organised governments, and the rule of law. There are many young people who deserve a chance to build a country that will provide a future and plenty of room for all. If you judge a country by its people, Bosnia and Herzegovina is already a fantastic country.

I even tend to say that BiH needs to be “Europeanized,” but Europe also needs to be “Bosnianized.” There are new and valuable people at all levels of government, but especially the lower ones. There are mayors who have turned their municipalities into little miracles. Just look at Tešanj, Grude, Gračanica, Derвента, Doboj, or Visoko. These people are creating the investment environment which also keeps young people at home. They are the ones who should get support. Party calculations must not be the only criteria for climbing the ladder. Young and capable people deserve a chance. And there has never been a shortage of such people in this country.

In general, I would wish to have more positive competition amongst constituent peoples, cantons and entities – a competition over who has the better universities or hospitals, the more functional police, unbiased media, more dynamic economy and a better investment climate. I believe this way BiH can become a potentially rich country where everyone is

working for a better tomorrow, without losing their respective identities. These different identities are the true wealth, just like in Vojvodina. We should be proud of this fact. This region is already a miniature version of Europe.