

Oslobodjenje: Interview with HR Valentin Inzko

By Mimi Djurovic-Rukavina

Oslobodjenje: Mr. Inzko, although BiH seems to have been taken aback a bit with NATO's decision, it is undoubtedly its greatest post-Dayton milestone. What are your expectations?

Valentin Inzko: I do believe that further Euro-Atlantic integration will bring significant benefits for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, although OHR does not have a role in this process; it is up to NATO and BiH to determine the nature of their relationship.

In this sense, it is clear that the issue of NATO integration of BiH is the competence and strategic foreign policy objective of the state of BiH; and as such it falls within the state's constitutional responsibilities related to foreign policy. It is within this sphere of state-level constitutional responsibilities that the formal foreign policy decisions on joining NATO have already been taken: by the BiH Presidency decision of 2009 and subsequent letter to NATO Secretary General, in which then BiH Presidency Chairman Radmanovic (SNSD) informed NATO that BiH is eager to join the organisation. As decisions of the BiH Presidency are valid until changed or subsumed, the 2009 Presidency decision is still in force. Also, the BiH Presidency adopted BiH's foreign policy strategy in March 2018, which also provides for NATO integration of BiH. Finally, it is worth underlining that Under Article 84 of the Law on Defence (Activities for Accession to NATO) the Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Presidency, and all defence authorities within their respective constitutional and legal competencies, shall conduct the required activities for the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to NATO.

Oslobodjenje: The last session of the PIC ended with a list of pretty concrete tasks for BiH authorities. However, it seems there are no new authorities in sight. To what extent does the government formation delay fall under your mandate? How will you react?

Valentin Inzko: Ever since the elections took place, we have been saying the obvious that the smooth and rapid formation of authorities at all levels is an absolute necessity. Political directors of the PIC Steering Board have reconfirmed this message. The citizens of this country have voted to have functioning parliaments and governments that will be able to make decisions and address real problems, rather than just to debate about coalitions and positions.

You will have seen from the Communiqué that the PIC Steering Board has encouraged BiH political and institutional leaders at relevant levels to engage, without further delay, in constructive dialogue, in a spirit of compromise, to enable the timely formation of functional legislative and executive authorities. Also, the PIC SB has called upon them to refrain from blocking or obstructing the implementation of election results.

Oslobodjenje: HDZ BiH keeps insisting on Election law amendments as a condition for government formation. How realistic is that?

Valentin Inzko: We would certainly prefer to have had a political agreement on this issue before the elections. Unfortunately, the political parties failed to reach an agreement to amend the electoral framework concerning the indirect election of delegates to the Federation House of Peoples before the elections, and this issue is still being discussed on a daily basis. In reality, there is no obstacle for the political leaders to come to an agreement even now. One thing is clear, this issue must not be used as an excuse to block the implementation of election results or to ignite divisive rhetoric. As we all know, the formula for the formation of the FBiH House of Peoples is under discussion by the CEC. My position is clear and known to the public: timely formation of authorities is of utmost importance and any solution to the FBiH HoP issue must be found by the BiH institutions in accordance with the FBiH Constitution. This opinion has been expressed in my Amicus Curiae, brief provided to the Constitutional Court of BiH. Full respect for the entity constitution on issues that fall within the organizational autonomy of the entities is important for both entities. What is at stake is therefore the ability of a state-level institution to change by decision the composition of entity institutions.

Oslobodjenje: SNSD, or rather their leader Milorad Dodik, has refused to meet with the PIC delegation without the entity flag. He has announced he would attend the next BiH Presidency session by video-link if there is no RS flag in the room. The Law on the Flag is clear. How do you interpret such

behavior?

Valentin Inzko: The BiH Presidency met under the BiH flag, which I welcome. As you have said, the Law on BiH Flag is clear. It states that the BiH flag shall be officially displayed on buildings of the Presidency and on all occasions of official international visits, and that no other flag from BiH shall be displayed together with the flag of BiH.

The meeting with PIC SB political directors was held in the presence of the BiH flag alone, which is in line with the relevant provisions of the Law on the Flag. After cordially greeting the members of the PIC, the Chair of the Presidency left the meeting, handed over correctly the floor to President Komsic, but it is regrettable that he chose to leave before a substantive discussion with PIC members. The PIC expects that all members of the Presidency – as the highest representative body of the state of BiH – will respect the laws and constitutional and legal framework of BiH.

Now, when the elections are over and when we are in process of formation of authorities, it is my clear message to BiH political and institutional leaders to work towards dialogue and cooperation, to refrain free from divisive and irresponsible rhetoric and actions. I hope that all the bickering we have witnessed during the elections campaign, slandering and personal attacks referring to family members for whose actions one cannot be responsible, etc will never repeat and that elected officials will work towards a common goal: successful BiH whose young generation will build its life here.

Oslobodjenje: Although a relative winner after the elections, SDA has been unable to find like-minded collocutors in the negotiations. At the same time, the only existing agreements are the one referring to special regime cantons where SDA and HDZ BiH appear together. Will these two parties finally call an election for Mostar?

Valentin Inzko: Talks among all political parties must continue and they must invest additional effort to resolve the issue of Mostar and enable the citizens of Mostar to cast their vote. Mr. Beslic can not carry this heavy burden alone. This obligation to solve the issue will not simply go away. It is of utmost importance that the issue of elections in Mostar is resolved in a manner that is consistent with the Court's decision, is legally sound, and does not divide the city.

Oslobodjenje: The "BiH bloc" has announced new government formation principles. Will Sarajevo serve as a model for changing policies in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: The priority is to have functional and efficient governments which will put the interests of the citizens and the numerous challenges the country is facing above narrow party policies or short-term goals.

Whether or not this coalition will be successful, and whether or not it should "spill over" to other areas is solely up to elected officials. Ultimately, the citizens are the one who will decide in four years whether the job was done or not.

Oslobodjenje: Russia has once more decided not to join the PIC conclusions. It is clear from their explanation that this is about continued support to the policies of SNSD. In your view, what does such behavior by Russia mean for the stabilization of the situation in BiH?

Valentin Inzko: The Peace Implementation Council Steering Board is a body which consists of important countries, which occasionally have different views on certain issues. Russia's positions are best explained by its formal representatives, so I will not comment on them. They have made them public. I will, however, say that I see more convergence of opinions among the PIC SB members than differences.

The bottom line is that all International Community members support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its future stability and prosperity. This was also confirmed by Russia recently in the UN Security Council.