

Večernji list: Interview with High Representative Valentin Inzko

Interviewed by Dejan Jazvic

The leading man of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, it is pretty much optimistic that the things will improve in this country, after the October elections. Optimism is very often the only thing that remains in the country that has stagnated at Euro-Atlantic path for years, where the number of unemployed exceeded half a million and one third of the population is living at the verge of poverty. However, Inzko assures us that there are real reasons for optimism this time. Unlike the experiences of the previous years, the Austrian diplomat with a long working experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina says that his Office of the High Representative (OHR) has no intention to interfere in the process of government formation this time, even though we are two months after the elections and the governments have not yet been formed at any level.

Many people still remember that the incumbent High Representative participated in the process of formation of the Federation authorities, which led to Lagumdžija's SDP rule. Croats were greatly embittered by this interference, because the party that gained the largest number of Croat votes (HDZ BiH) at that time and at the last elections too, was not included in the government. Clearly, a similar scenario is not a part of the deal this time.

Večernji list: Is the OHR going to intervene in the process of government formation in the post-election period, and, if yes, how and when?

Valentin Inzko: I would gladly step in when it comes to the

implementation of the legal obligations requiring that women should make 40 percent of the membership in the executive branch and public companies. It would be really nice to see more women in the governing institutions. Similarly, it would be good to see the government making a decision to reduce the number of ministries and administrations in general. I believe that the citizens would approve it, so in that sense, I might "interfere" but just in terms of giving my recommendations to this end. Otherwise, it is not my intention to interfere, and I do not see a reason why I should interfere, in the process of formation of governments. I think that we will not have the same problems we had in some previous situations. Last time, we did not have the state level government for 15 months and it took 9 months to complete the Federation House of Peoples, and the deadline for their establishment is 60 days. There are indications that this situation will not happen again and I expect that the authorities at all levels will be quickly established. Everyone knows that the authorities can no longer work as before.

Večernji list: Many people warn about potential problems if the authorities at the state and entity level are not made up of the same political parties and coalitions. How realistic are these warnings, including those about possible blockades?

Valentin Inzko: There have been such examples of different coalitions in other countries too. For example, in Bavaria, they often had a right-wing government in power and at the federal level there was a coalition led by social democrats. Although this was the case there, they had a fair working relationship. Things are similar in Austria, where we have nine provinces. The point is that we have a strong coordination and only one leading principle – that every government serves its citizens. It is less important whether the coalition is made up of the same type of parties or that it is a co-habitual way of governing. It is important that we have a good will for cooperation. If you sit in the government

and strictly respect the constitution and the laws including the principle that you have to serve the citizens, then you will not have any problems in the functioning of government. I have a good feeling that there will be a positive change and that politicians can open a new chapter in the politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Večernji list: Is it just your feeling or you have some information that you could share with us?

Valentin Inzko: I have some indications, signals, because I spoke with the Presidency members and they all indicated their readiness for cooperation. I think this will reflect in the new approach of the Presidency of BiH. They will have different views, but I believe they will try to resolve this between themselves, and appear in the public with what they agreed on. For instance, I expect an agreement on the observance of the 20th anniversary of Srebrenica. So, there are indications that a new approach will be taken. One should not forget two events which marked this year, and they are the protests in February and floods in May. Citizens were dissatisfied with the conduct of the government and all those who have been elected know this. The ruling parties know that we had eight years of deadlock and that such conduct cannot continue. Therefore, I expect a thorough change of politics in BiH.

Večernji list: What do you expect of the new authorities? What should be their priorities?

Valentin Inzko: Their priority surely cannot be „business as usual“. The way politics is pursued must change dramatically. It is not important that we have „old“ parties. Aleksandar Vučić cried when Šešelj went to the Hague, but he saw in the meantime that the best road for Serbia was the European road and he normalized relations with Priština. People can change, mature, and a view that things must change has matured in BiH. The first step in this direction is a quick formation of

governments at all levels. It would be good if we had governments at all levels before the beginning of February. It was a problem in Great Britain that the government was formed after „only“ five days, and no-one here felt any shame that the government was not established even after 15 months. It is important that Brussels knows who its partner in BiH is. This is a priority and, of course, the economy. I would give the Nobel Prize for economy to everyone in BiH who lives with a family on 250 euros a month.

Večernji list: Everyone agrees that the German-British initiative, which will become an official initiative of the European Union, is a great chance for BiH and acceleration of reforms on the European road. Do you believe in its implementation?

Valentin Inzko: It is a fantastic chance and back in May I spoke about this with the German foreign minister. I do not want to say that this is the last chance, but it is the only chance which is at the table now. There is no other initiative and I am convinced that it restores hope in BiH. I am convinced that it will deblock the European process. The conditions for BiH have not changed, but a change in the order has occurred, so that, in a sense, it will be a little easier to achieve a candidacy status for EU membership. For me, this is more important than the membership itself, because that is when transition begins, getting closer to European legal standards. Citizens of BiH wonder rightly why we do not have the European legal standards like Croatia. Why do we not have politicians in jail. They link the European standards with the rule of law. You in BiH have a situation that 85 rulings of the Constitutional Court are not implemented. This is impermissible. The EU has repeatedly opened its doors and shown readiness to help BiH and it should be taken advantage of. With so many burning issues in the world, the EU has decided to pay considerable attention to BiH despite all and it is an excellent opportunity.

Večernji list: BiH Croats expect the issue of their status in BiH to be resolved in this electoral mandate. What is your view of that?

Valentin Inzko: I often compare the three constituent peoples in BiH with three brothers and perhaps the Croats are here, numerically, the „smallest“ brother and should be given special attention. I think that progress will really be made in the next four years so that the Croat people are satisfied with their status, and that they will feel more that BiH is their country, that they will decide to stay, rather than leave, and create here their „little California“. The economy is important, but the functionality of the state, too. The Croat people must have its place at all government levels. We need a friendly and sincere approach here, which can yield results with a positive spirit. One should do everything that the Croats are happy citizens of this state. Accommodate them, but not to be understood as an act of charity, but take it as something that belongs to them. If I can do anything and help, I am certainly ready to do so.

Večernji list: What will happen to Mostar? Which initiatives and solutions can we expect, as it is known that the City is in a kind of blockade. It is the only local community in which the local elections were not held, because there is no decision on the manner of election of the city councillors in accordance with the decision of the Constitutional Court?

Valentin Inzko: PIC Steering Board called for the implementation of and compliance with the decisions of the Constitutional Court of BiH, as they are final and binding. That will enable Mostar to remain a single, coherent, multiethnic and, hopefully, a rich local self-government unit with a certain degree of local authorities, administration below city level.

Večernji list: What is the future of the OHR in these circumstances? Will the progress of BiH in the implementation

of the German-British initiative create preconditions for the closure of your Office?

Valentin Inzko: The role of the OHR has changed over time. Also in the sense that BiH has taken over more and more work from the international community. At one point we had around 800 employees in the OHR, at the time of Paddy Ashdown. When I came there were 250 people, and now there are 110 of us. So it is a consequence of the fact that our role is changing. In future, the OHR will be closed. Of course, I support the principle „more Brussels, less Dayton“. Dayton is still here and that is a reality. There is no new Constitution. The decision on OHR closure will be made at the level of the PIC, and for me that will be a happy day, when I say that BiH is irreversibly on the Euro-Atlantic road, as a single and decentralised state. Once that is achieved, that will be the moment to close the OHR.

Večernji list: How much do the global relations between the West, i.e. the US and EU on one side and Russia on the other, reflect on the work of the PIC and thus also the OHR and international policy in BiH in general?

Valentin Inzko: In May we saw that Russians refused to support the PIC communique as a whole, whereas now they distanced themselves from only one paragraph related to Euro-Atlantic integration of BiH. I can be neutral with regard to that issue, because I come from Austria, which is also neutral when it comes to NATO. However, one needs to know that a former composition of BiH Presidency sent a request to NATO and that all three members agreed to activate the NATO MAP. So it is a wish of BiH. In the last PIC session Russia expressed the view that the Euro-Atlantic road is not the only perspective for BiH. However, I think that that is an authentic wish of the citizens and politicians and that that road should be maintained. Russia has its role in the PIC. In 1995 they had a constructive role in stopping the war. In the past Russia accepted the Euro-Atlantic road. Now it abandoned that

position due to the global situation. However, with regard to BiH, I believe we all want a sovereign BiH with territorial integrity, and Russians supported that.

Večernji list: Do you believe that a part of the international community wants to oust Milorad Dodik because he got too close to Russia, or its President Vladimir Putin?

Valentin Inzko: I am meeting him these days and I am sure that he will rethink his policy. He was a favourite of the West. Mr. Dodik has great talents, but of course you can use your talents for negative and for positive purposes. I hope that he will use his talents in the positive sense, and that is what the citizens of the RS expect him to do. We all wish for a prosperity in the whole of BiH, which of course means the RS as well. As for me, I have not had any reflections like the ones you just mentioned.