



Press conference by the High Representative Miroslav Lajčák following the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board session in Brussels on 26-27 February 2008

During the last two days Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council had an opportunity to exchange views on the situation in BiH among ourselves, with the BiH Presidency, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, his two deputies and the leaders of the 6 political parties that make up the governing coalition.

We discussed the current political situation in BiH and the strategy of future presence of International Community in BiH. The adopted Communiqué is now available.

There are three points I want to stress:

- The first is that the Peace Implementation Council is united in its views and the Communiqué was adopted unanimously by all PIC members.
- It was stressed several times that all parties must fully comply with the DPA.
- Closure of OHR remains our goal, but the BiH authorities must ensure that conditions for OHR closure are met.

Let me elaborate on the last point.

Long-term objective of the PIC and OHR is to see Bosnia and Herzegovina as a “peaceful, viable state irreversibly

on course for European integration”.

In this context there are a number of longstanding objectives that the PIC Steering Board considers essential for the creation of such a peaceful, viable state.

The most critical issues will be considered objectives to be achieved by the BiH authorities before transition can take place. From a long list of known priorities we have selected the key ones for transition, for closure of OHR.

They are:

- Resolution of State Property
- Resolution of Defence Property
- Completion of the Brcko Final Award
- Fiscal Sustainability of the State
- Entrenchment of the Rule of Law

In addition to these objectives there are also two conditions: signing of the SAA and a positive assessment of the situation in BiH by the PIC SB are essential prior to transition.

Let me stress that there is nothing new in these objectives. They are part of the OHR work-plan, are approved by the PIC SB and have all been previously recognized by BiH authorities as their obligations.

The fulfilment of these objectives and conditions would open the way for transition of OHR. Until then OHR will remain in place and continue to carry out its mandate under the Dayton Peace Agreement, ensuring full respect of the Peace Agreement.

There has been a declared goal of OHR closure since 2006. Rather than a time driven process we are now focusing on policy objectives to be achieved. Once they are in place OHR could close.

The Peace Implementation Council Steering Board will be regularly reviewing progress at its meetings in Sarajevo. The next comprehensive review will take place at the next PIC SB meeting in June.

In terms of next reform steps, it is clear that most urgent is adoption of police reform legislation.

The Steering Board of the PIC welcomed the progress made by BiH leadership, which led to the initialling of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement on 4 December last year.

The signing of the SAA is finally in reach, as soon as the necessary conditions are met.

However PIC SB also stated that important underlying problems, which gave rise to recent crises, remain in BiH.

It is worrying that the positive, constructive atmosphere which led to the initialling of the SAA deteriorated so quickly.

Instead of engaging in intense dialogue to find solutions; the political leadership, once again took up diametrically opposed and maximalist positions.

There have been renewed tensions between political actors over the future constitutional make-up of the country as well as the role and competencies of the state. State-level institutions have been called into question and there have also been challenges to the Dayton Peace Agreement.

The PIC SB expressed deep concern with official calls for secession and stressed that it is clear that an Entity of BiH has no right to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One of the important elements stressed by all the members of the Peace Implementation Steering Board is that the BiH politicians must fully comply with the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement. They must end the practice of threatening unilateral changes to the constitutional structure of the country.

There must be no question that Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two entities and that Bosniacs, Croats and Serbs are constituent peoples throughout the whole country.

In every country political life has its positive and negative cycles, but in BiH the negative political cycles seem to be much longer and more difficult to break. Through their words and actions the political leadership can either transform the negative cycles into positive ones or escalate the situation into another downward spiral.

We have many examples that progress can be achieved quickly when there is dialogue and political will. This is currently missing in BiH. PIC stressed that all the local leaders must engage in a dialogue.

The Peace Implementation Council will continue to review and monitor the situation in the country against the objectives and conditions I have outlined and which are presented in more detail in our Communiqué.

Before concluding I just want to stress once again that we have full unanimity in the PIC Steering Board that all parties must comply with the Dayton Peace Agreement as well as all other issues we discussed. It is important and encouraging that we adopted a joint platform in which we defined what must be done to start the process of OHR transition.

Thank you.

RTQ's:

Swiss Broadcasting Corporation:

The fact that you were able to set a deadline and now you basically do not have any more timeframe, a defined, precise timeframe, at least in public, should we consider that as a signal that things have gone actually worse for Bosnia and Herzegovina then before? Considering the messages you were giving, you were basically telling the Bosnians that, *if you do not want to see our face again do this, this and this*. Are you actually sure that they want you to leave -behind the official wording of some politicians?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

The answer to your first question is no. We changed our approach because we believe and I personally strongly believe that the approach which is based on policy objectives is the proper one. As soon as we focus on time we cannot predict, we cannot foresee what the developments will be, plus we will have the local players playing against the time. Here we expect positive motivation from all the players to try to achieve the set objectives, because we all know that by achieving these objectives Bosnia and Herzegovina will become a better functioning state with stronger state-level institutions more efficiently functioning. So, I do believe that this is the right approach. It is the result of the consultations we had with all of the members of the Peace Implementation Council and with the local players as well, and we expect everybody to be focused on the target here.

And what was the second question?

Swiss Broadcasting Corporation:

Are you sure they want you to leave? It is so nice to have you here.

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

It is difficult to find one issue on which the position of all the players in Bosnia and Herzegovina is united and of course the presence of the OHR is amongst these issues where we have different approaches, different views – of course we know that, but we are sure that the strategy which was adopted today is the one which will be accepted and supported by all the local players for all the reasons they may have.

Italian news agency Apcom:

There was one word that you did not mention, and that is Kosovo. How worried are you about the impact of the independence of Kosovo on Bosnia? Is this destabilizing the country or not? Also, after these two days of meetings

are you satisfied that the EU and the international community are focusing enough on Bosnia and are not being distracted by what is happening in Priština and Belgrade?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

I, as the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, am responsible to make sure that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not affected by the developments in the region, including Kosovo. It is also my goal to make sure that the international community, which is present and active in Bosnia and Herzegovina, stays united. And this has been just achieved and I feel greatly encouraged by the fact that we demonstrated unity in assessing the situation and future activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The second point that I would like to make is that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a hostage of Kosovo. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country that knows exactly what the tasks ahead are and what has to be done in order to progress along the European path. So, there is no single issue on which Bosnia and Herzegovina depends on Kosovo.

Thirdly, we have seen reactions, particularly in Republica Srpska. We also heard from Prime Minister Dodik today and he has guaranteed peace and stability in Republica Srpska regardless of the developments in the region, and he continues to provide his guarantees. We take his word for granted and we do not expect to see any commotions or any signs of destabilization in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Frank Hofmann, Deutsche Welle:

When I have in mind the pictures from Banja Luka yesterday and also the previous days before that – I am talking about the attacks on the German Consulate there and the attempted attacks on the American consulate – this does not give me a very strong picture of peace and quietness when it comes to Banja Luka. Also, it does not give me a feeling that Bosnia is not a hostage of Kosovo like you were pointing out. So my question is are you ready to use your Bonn powers to ease this and to calm the situation down again? After I heard what Mr. Dodik said in his speech I had the impression that he is indeed playing with the situation. That is my first question.

My second question is that if we have in mind that the politics and the policy of conditionality in the past time in Bosnia did not really succeed and that you did a great job to bring Bosnia back on track after the blockades only a couple of months ago, what is your argument pro a decision to now bring back conditionality on the table?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

First on Kosovo. Of course I am not an independent political analyst to speculate about the impact. I made it clear that of course Kosovo does have an impact, at least in creating an atmosphere throughout the region. At the same time, Bosnia is not a hostage of Kosovo and there is no excuse to use Kosovo for Bosnia's own problems and setbacks. So Bosnia's destiny is in the hands of Bosnia and Herzegovina's representatives. I do not want to speculate about the sentiment of the Serbian nation throughout the region. Prime Minister Dodik spoke about it at length and he said that he is under pressure. At the same time, the RS authorities were able to control the expressions of this overall Serbian sentiment. I do not expect any further protests or movements which might have the capacity to destabilize the country.

Of course I have accepted my mandate and the Bonn powers are a part of my mandate. So that means that if there are threats to the peace and stability and to the respect for the Dayton Peace Agreement I will have no hesitation and I will use my Bonn powers.

Your second question was on conditionality. I do believe that the conditions we have set and defined today are positive ones. So, I am a believer of positive conditionality. These conditions should motivate our partners to deliver on their promises. First of all, as I said, the issues are not new, they have been around for some time and most of the pieces of legislation have been in the pipe lines already, in one way or another, and the end aim is a better functioning state. So I would not call this negative conditionality, on the contrary.

Tarik Lazović, Dnevni Avaz:

About the Bonn powers again. Some Bosnian officials, exactly – Mr. Željko Komšić, a member of the Presidency and the Chairman, and Prime Minister Dodik – today said that you did not have any more support from the Peace Implementation Council to use the Bonn powers. Is that correct?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

No it is not. The Bonn powers are my prerogative, it is my responsibility, my authority. I said that I will have no hesitation to use my Bonn powers whenever I feel I have to use them. I do not think that my role as the High Representative and the role of the Bonn powers that I have is to do the job instead of or for the legitimately elected local representatives. So, there are issues which they have to solve on their level, they have to discuss and engage in talks, and arrive at a consensual agreement. If they believe the OHR, High Representative and Bonn powers are here to do the job for one party, to impose their will on another party, then we do not share the same understanding of the role of the High Representative and the Bonn powers.