Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, High Representative/EU Special Representative in BiH: “In BiH, nobody is telling the whole truth”

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High Representative Miroslav Lajčak summarizes the past year for Start, explaining why we deserved the much-vaunted initialing, how he felt in Stanković’s company, whether we can expect a new wave of price rises, when we will become part of Europe, how citizens should communicate with politicians, how prime ministers should communicate with journalists…

Interviewer: Selvedin Avdić
Start: You were chosen Personality of the Year together with Dodik’s businessman Stanković and a certain journalist called Soldo. The former is connected with nearly all of the RS Prime Minister’s million-dollar transactions, and the latter is not very well known to the broader circles of our readers. How did you feel in their company?

Miroslav Lajčak: The question of those who have been honoured is, I think, a matter for the panel that made the selection. I am glad that *Nezavisne novine* chose me on the grounds that I promote consensus in this country, and this, for me, is a

reason to accept this award. They have their reasons why and on what criteria they selected the journalist and the businessman, but that's a question for them.

Start: That's why we asked how you felt in their company?
Miroslav Lajčak: I felt completely as normal.

Start: Did you wonder what sort of persons they were before you received the award?

Miroslav Lajčak: Logically. I can't receive an award without doing that.

Start: One can't deny your impressive energy and élan, but, at the same time, you have shown inconsistency in the implementation of decisions. Why did you give up on the initial proposal of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure?

Miroslav Lajčak: I'm aware of my mandate and powers, and that this country must be normal one day in terms of taking full responsibility for its decisions. The International Community must lead this country towards that. I think it's better that my decisions are not 100 percent ideal; I'd rather they were 95 percent ideal but a domestic product. Politicians must get used to giving up extremist demands and make agreements.

Start: There's an impression in the public, though, that you gave in to extremist demands?

Miroslav Lajčak: I didn't give in to extremist demands. I said at the beginning that I could accept what was in compliance with my conditions, that the document should be harmonized with the Constitution and that, of course, it has support of all political parties. These three conditions were met and I would have been wrong to react in any other way. I am really happy that the politicians made this agreement that improves the work of the Parliament.

Start: Did you expect such a complicated political situation

when you were preparing for this office?

Miroslav Lajčak: There is nothing that was going to surprise me. I expected all these factors. On the other hand, these problems were deeper in many regards than I had thought. Much more energy must be invested to get any result.

Start: What has disappointed you in particular?
Miroslav Lajčak: The enormous lack of trust. We can't make changes if we say, ok, let's make changes, but I can't give this, I can't concede that. This is the problem we've been fighting every step of the way.

Start: Several times you have identified the guilty parties for many things. The past year has been marked by overt crime, corruption, crisis of government, price rises… Can you say now who the main culprits are for this situation?

Miroslav Lajčak: It's the political leaders who are most deserving of everything that is a success and most responsible for everything that is a failure. And don't expect me to give you any names now. Each political party leader, each state institution leader assumes responsibility together with the office. For success and for failure – and that's your answer.

Start: Let me rephrase the question then… Whose increased engagement would soften the current situation?

Miroslav Lajčak: You know I expressed my dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the Government's and the Parliament's work. But, the key problem is the atmosphere, the fact that politicians were unable to meet. The Government could not function without clear political instructions. And that is not normal, when ministers are actually just delegates of their political leaders. We had a situation where political leaders were only talking through the media. Now we have regular meetings. I think people have understood how good that is and things have moved on.

Start: The Federation Parliament recently discussed the price rises, but no Government representatives were present at the session. What is your comment?

Miroslav Lajčak: A pathological situation. All information that should go to the people should be serious. Politicians use harsh words lightly, as was the case in October when they spoke about a war. People react to that sort of thing, particularly in a country such as BiH. Politicians should think twice before they say things. Second, all issues concerning living conditions should be addressed in a serious way. It is the minister who should explain the problem, the reason for it, and what people can expect – because this is the most basic thing – political responsibility.

Start: What do your economic advisors say: can we expect more price rises?
Miroslav Lajčak: They say these recent price rises were a reflection of a broader international trend that came to BiH later, which means there are objective reasons for it.

Start: Shall we expect new increases?
Miroslav Lajčak: That depends on trends in the broader environment.

Start: So, this is not a case of artificially created price rises?
Miroslav Lajčak: No, that is our assessment.

Start: Do you believe BiH will sign the SAA in 2008?
Miroslav Lajčak: I do. I think all the political leaders are really interested in that. There is an atmosphere of enthusiasm. There was a meeting of the working group recently, Of course, there will be problems. It's logical. We don't only have police reform, but another three conditions related to that. We don't really have much progress on PBS reform, but the atmosphere is such as to give rise to hope. Two months ago we were in a situation where it seemed that the EU was

interested but Bosnia was reticent.

Start: Can you say how BiH, in the middle of the greatest government crisis, managed suddenly to initial the SAA? How did we deserve that?

Miroslav Lajčak: On 11 October I said *stop*. No more force, no more imposition of the European road because that was utterly abnormal. And then, a process began – less ambitious but original, with legitimacy based on the support of all six political leaders; this reflected the political situation in the country. This was the Mostar Declaration. Then the EU said, fine, super, this is a small step, but we need more. Then we have the Action Plan from Sarajevo, which was just what they needed. So, some kind of dialogue was established – something was achieved here – and the EU reacted instantly. I am glad that I managed to persuade the highest EU officials to support this tendency…

Start: I'd really like to know how you felt when after all your efforts politicians took the credit themselves.

Miroslav Lajčak: I'm glad for the country. Every success has lots of fathers. If the fathers appear it means that we have succeeded and that's the key thing for me.

Start: What would the police structure look like on the basis of the Mostar Declaration? But, please, make it a short and precise explanation.

Miroslav Lajčak: The elements of the Mostar Declaration are that the police reform complies with the three European principles, second, that it will be divided into two stages. The first stage is the state level and the second stage is the local level. The state level should be resolved straight away, while the local should be organized in accordance with the constitution of this country. The current constitution is followed now, and after the adoption of a new constitution, the situation will change in accordance with the new

constitution. Another key element is that this was the first document that finally received the support of all six political parties. This constitutes a platform.

Start: This platform will enable extremist positions on police reform to be reconciled. How?

Miroslav Lajčak: I have been saying since the beginning that we have an atmosphere where politicians realized that they would lose if they continued to obstruct, while everyone would gain with a compromise. The working group is working now on drafting a law and this law must satisfy all six political partners. This is a process in which the EU observes – we are certainly not dictating anything.

Start: How do you see a compromise?

Miroslav Lajčak: First we have to change the way we look at things. We should not look at who lost and who won, who has to pay a political price. For, this is a totally unwise philosophy which dominates public life, which precisely does not allow politicians to make agreements. We cannot look at public life in this country as a continuation of the war by political means – where, in principle, whoever is more willing to make a compromise must pay a political price. We have to change the way we look at things.

Start: Dodik has recently stated that he does not believe that BiH will exist in 10 years? What do you think?

Miroslav Lajčak: I believe that BiH will at that time be very close to EU membership or an EU member already. I've seen that program and the context in which he said it. It is important that he says that BiH should respect the RS and that the RS respects BiH. He says when there is no announcement about abolishing the RS there will be no announcements of a referendum. So it means we should see these statements in this context. In interviews with the Sarajevo media I sound as if I'm defending Dodik, and in contacts with the Banja Luka media

it looks as if I am defending **Haris Silajdžić…**

Start: Please, can a serious prime minister allow himself to make such a statement, and then we search for the context in which he made that statement?

Miroslav Lajčak: A lot that is happening in BiH in terms of media does not fall within the category of seriousness, unfortunately. And that is why we are trying to bring this country into the European mainstream for it brings more transparency, more responsibility. And now I would not wish to go further into this, for that would again cause the usual – so and so said this, so and so said that, you did not react then.

Start: Recently the same prime minister threatened the FTV editor-in-chief and our columnist Bakir Hadziomerovic. Will OHR take some steps? For it was a very concrete threat?

Miroslav Lajčak: I think that it would be good if a code of conduct of politicians towards the media were issued here.

Start: Do you think that this was a serious threat?

Miroslav Lajčak: I don't think so. I think it goes into the category of very serious words that are easily spoken. However, a leader should be a leader, he should be an example.

Start: Don't you think that now it could occur to someone to attack the journalist in order to help their leader? This is a serious matter…

Miroslav Lajčak: Of course, I cannot support such statements. A leader should set an example, in the way in which he controls himself, that's a leader. And in terms of this you as media have the opportunity to show such things and put them into context.

Start: So, you think that Hadžiomerović has nothing to fear?

Miroslav Lajčak: I think that it is not a seriously calculated threat, and on the other hand, there are plenty of crazy people who trust their leaders. If a leader says something unserious, they understand it as an instruction.

Start: What would be your recommendation to Hadžiomerović?

Miroslav Lajčak: I would advise him and all media to do their job honorably, to show the public social developments that must not be tolerated. So that we all together, in such a way, create an atmosphere of intolerance towards behavior of politicians that is not in line with basic cultural manners.

Start: What's your comment on the recent meeting between Silajdžić and General Delic? Do you believe that it is only a mistake of the cabinet?

Miroslav Lajčak: I think that it was not done to harm Delić. I think that this reflects the existing situation in our society, to some the war crimes indictees are heroes, and to others they are war criminals. And this, of course, is an additional thing that complicates the creation of a healthy atmosphere. Of course, this should not have happened, for this is a very bad message, primarily to members of the people against whom, allegedly, the crime was committed. The court has to prove this and issue a verdict, but nonetheless they are indicted. Another thing in BiH is that members of one people tend to be more sensitive to their own feelings than to the feelings of others… Everybody wants to see that part of the truth that suits them, and keep silent about that part of the truth that does not fall within their concept. So, three truths are being created, no one lies, but no one tells the whole truth and then a picture of confusion is created.

Start: People that your predecessors removed for obstruction of the Dayton Agreement have been amnestied and they are making a grand entry onto the BiH political scene. It is difficult to believe that they have changed in the meantime.

Miroslav Lajčak: I respect Decisions of my predecessors; there are people for whom the deadline has passed. They have a chance to come back. Those who have had bans imposed for an indefinite period of time must not come back and there is no compromise there.

Start: How is that period assessed?

Miroslav Lajčak: That was part of their Decisions, and I do not know what the basis for their assessment was, but I accept that as a fact. I am a successor here.

Start: People say that they have no one to vote for. Do you see any political force in BiH for which they could vote?

Miroslav Lajčak: I see a huge frustration among citizens and they should not be reproached for that. I can see very few interactions between politicians and citizens – politicians here feel the control of citizens to a considerably lesser extent than is the case in other countries. And, of course, political parties have a great influence on the media and we all know that – and much more so than in other countries of the region. Elements of civic society which create the scene of public control are weak here and citizens do not see themselves as a political force.

Start: Media are incessantly presenting documents on crime, but no one is held accountable! What's your comment on that?

Miroslav Lajčak: No one is consistent in that. If we have facts, we should address the prosecutor's office. If the prosecutor's office does not do anything, then media should again raise the issue – why are things stalled, why is nothing done? Today we have one scandal, but the next scandal obscures the last one. I am reminding you of the robbery at the Airport, no one has suffered consequences for that: who resigned? Then a new scandal will happen and no one will bear consequences.

Start: Since you came, have you ever thought to use the Bonn powers and remove politicians?

Miroslav Lajčak: I am using the Bonn powers. On several occasions I thought about it and once I was close to it. I removed one politician, he is not at the highest level. I consider the pros and cons and act accordingly. This is part of my mandate, part of my responsibility.

Start: Why should people stay in BiH in 2008?

Miroslav Lajčak: Because it will be a good year in BiH. Better than the previous one. That’s why.