

Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, High Representative for BiH/EU Special Representative

In his interview with "Novosti", the High Representative of the International Community in BiH said that the recent crisis was not as dramatic as was reported:

– When ordinary people started fearing a new war, the politicians realised that it was better both for them and for the country to agree.

*** Your measures have been directed against the influence of the Entities, against the RS...**

– They have not reduced the influence of the Entities; what they were intended to do was to facilitate decision-making at the level of the government and the parliament. All three constituent peoples are sensitive when it comes to the protection of their interests. Had these measures endangered those rights, the reaction would have been very negative from all three sides. That is why this reaction has nothing to do with the substance but is a result of a lack of confidence that is widespread here.

*** All the parties from the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina supported your measures, and the protest came from the RS, so one doesn't have to be particularly wise to conclude who your measures were directed against and who they were in favour of?**

– That confirms my position that confidence is lacking here, and that something that is welcomed by Bosniaks is automatically seen as anti-Serb.

*** There have been some claims that your measures were intended to neutralise a possible reaction of the Republika Srpska to a radical resolution of the status of Kosovo and Metohija?**

– When I imposed the measures, I was thinking about the functionality of the Council of Ministers and the Parliament. I did not speculate on any regional concept at all. BiH is not a hostage of Kosovo. This country has wasted a lot of time and we should see to it that it joins the EU.

*** How much longer will the protector's "Bonn powers" remain in force? Russia is demanding that they be abolished, and it does not think that the OHR stands a lot of chance either...**

– The decision on that falls within the competencies of the Peace Implementation Council. It is certain that no one is in favour of them staying in force longer than necessary. Once we see that the powers are not needed any longer, once local politicians start making decisions within the required deadlines and in line with European standards, then no one will keep the High Representative or his powers needlessly.

*** Sarajevo-based parties insist that the OHR should stay, which clearly shows that the international community often had a partisan role instead of a neutral one?**

– It is bad that someone uses the international community for confrontation with their political opponents.

*** Constitutional changes have been announced. What the Serb people want to know – is the future of the RS in doubt?**

– The RS is a constitutional fact of this country! Full stop! I see no reason for so much speculation on that. This country has two Entities, one is called the RS, and nobody can change that. These easy popular slogans – "we are not giving Srpska away" on the one hand, and "we will abolish Srpska" on the other – are not feasible. Everybody can sleep in peace. That is the starting point. This constitution guarantees the status quo. It stops any backward slide, but it does not provide for a way forward.

*** Is a three-Entity structure in which every people would have its own administrative unit a good idea?**

– For us, two things are of key importance. That it is a constitution that everybody can identify with and that it is not imposed. We support all ideas that promote BiH as a multiethnic state, and we oppose ethnic divisions.

*** Recently in the RS there was an opinion poll which found that 66 percent of the population is in**

favour of a referendum in which citizens would vote on the status of the Entity. Why are in this region Albanians given certain rights that Serbs are deprived of?

- That is very dangerous political and social engineering, which is unacceptable. BiH is an internationally recognised state, and the RS is an Entity within BiH.

*** Why did the Czech Republic and Slovakia break apart?**

- Because we had different views on our roles in the future.

*** If the RS and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina were to come to similar conclusions, would that be enough for the international community to allow them to split in peace?**

- I don't think like that. BiH must guarantee a perspective to each citizen and each citizen must believe in it. That is my mandate.

KOSOVO AND BOSNIA ARE NOT LINKED

*** How do you as a Slovak, but also a representative of the international community, look at the process of resolution of the final status of Kosovo?**

- My position does not allow me to express my personal opinion on Kosovo and to comment on the positions of any EU member, including my own country. I think about BiH, and what is key for me is for BiH to make progress. I will not allow any artificial links between Kosovo and BiH.

MESIĆ RECEIVED NO CRITICISM

*** Why did you not condemn the statements of Stjepan Mesić that the RS should be abolished, in particular after you strongly reacted to the request of Vojislav Koštunica that you should respect the Dayton Agreement?**

- An impression of bias is being created, and I maintain that that is not true. We react whenever we think it is necessary to do so. Sometimes we react, and sometimes the EU reacts. No one can abolish the RS. I have said that many times, even formally in the BiH Parliament and the RS National Assembly.