

Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative “Action starts from September”



Compromises are going to be painful, but even that is better than someone from outside deciding for you, Lajčák says – There will be no competition between the European Union and the United States

In his first interview since he officially took office as High Representative of the international community and Special Representative of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovak diplomat Miroslav Lajčák emphasised that he had international support and he was coming as a friend. During the interview, Lajčák made an impression of a sincere and open person, who has the best intentions for this country.

First impressions

Oslobođenje: What are your impressions after your first talks with BiH officials?

Miroslav Lajčák: My impression is that the partners are serious and one can see a wish to make a step forward. They are aware of the situation, there really is a political impasse. It is encouraging that the definition of key issues

is the same. Of course, there is a difference as to how these issues need to be resolved and it would be strange if these differences did not exist.

Oslobođenje: How long is this period of introductory contacts going to last, considering that annual holidays are approaching?

Miroslav Lajčák: These initial contacts are courtesy calls and working meetings at the same time. I will use the time before the annual holidays, of course. I think I will use the first five of six weeks after my arrival to complete this circle of working meetings, and then make an analysis after that. In this way, we could take action on the basis of this analysis immediately after the annual holidays, from September.

Oslobođenje: Is it fair to say that because of the urgent need to sign the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), police reform is a greater priority than the constitutional reform?

Miroslav Lajčák: Police reform is an urgent issue in the sense that it is directly linked to the signing of the SAA. That is a fact. For the EU and the European Commission this link is very simple. We want to sign this agreement. We, on the EU side, have already done our part of the job and we are now waiting for Bosnia and Herzegovina to make an agreement on this reform. This is an urgent issue as no one wants to postpone the signing of the SAA for a longer period of time. In this sense, it is a priority. Looking at BiH internally, the issue of the Constitution imposes itself as a priority. It needs to be adjusted to the current time and to the tasks ahead of this country. Therefore, these two issues are linked, although there is no formal linkage. I do not want to speculate as to what is more important and what is more urgent. Because, one of these issues is more important for the European Integration process, and the other is more important in a broader sense. Besides, the constitutional reform cannot

be resolved in a short period of time. And the police reform, with current political consensus, can be simpler.

Oslobođenje: Is there enough time to ratify the SAA before the end of the year?

Miroslav Lajčák: Of course there is. But, a step forward must be made here. We have to return the political climate to normality. Because, the first and the second, the third and the fourth require agreement and compromise. Compromise must not be seen as a sign of weakness or defeat. It is in fact my victory as I have given something so that we can all gain something together. But, if everyone firmly holds their positions and yields nothing, then they only show what great heroes they are while everyone loses.

Oslobođenje: I presume that Haris Silajdžić and Milorad Dodik know all this, and yet they confront their extreme positions. How can we achieve compromise between them?

Miroslav Lajčák: I expect statesmen to behave like statesmen. I expect them to be aware of their responsibility to their voters and responsibility to their country. I have already said that a true leader is not the one who follows but one who leads. He or she should lead in the right direction. He can stay without support of his voters for a while as they perhaps do not understand the process, but he should use the fact that they trust him and follow him. Because a leader who does only what his voters tell him to do and who speaks what they currently wish to hear can hardly build anything. People do not want to hear that something will be hard, that they enter a reform process that will be painful. However, no successful country made success without this.

A recipe exists

Oslobođenje: Perhaps they are afraid of ending up like former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov, who brought democracy to the country and then lost power?

Miroslav Lajčák: Ok, Gorbachov did not aim at European integration. And BiH wants to go in that direction. We have proven recipes, signposts and standards for this.

Oslobođenje: You mean the Slovak example?

Miroslav Lajčák: Among others, the Slovak example. You can choose. I know when we went into this process and became an associated EU member everything was much easier. There is no speculation. We have signposts. This is something Gorbachov did not have and that is why he got lost on this road. But Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot get lost. Moreover, it can use the experiences of the countries in the region. Invite to all your ministries experts from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary or Slovenia and they will tell you right away what cannot pass in Brussels and what will not function here.

Oslobođenje: Your predecessor (Christian Schwarz-Schilling) warned that he had spent more time in this office on coordination with the capitals than on contacts with BiH politicians?

Miroslav Lajčák: There will be no competition between the EU and the United States. I feel strong support behind me, from the PIC members and from the EU members. This does not mean that this will be the case during my whole mandate, but it is very important for the beginning. It is always easier to make an agreement on the side of the international community if an agreement is reached here in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If there is no agreement in the country, everyone has his or her perception and everyone has someone in the international community who is closer to him and who can address him separately. I invite local politicians to make compromises, which will be painful, but even that is better than someone from the outside deciding for you.

Oslobođenje: Are you going to be stricter than Schilling?

Miroslav Lajčák: I am my own person and I do not come as an

enemy.

The past and the justice

Oslobođenje: What is your view of the resistance of RS leaders to the Potočari Memorial Center being under the state care?

Miroslav Lajčák: I will visit Banja Luka on Thursday and will surely talk about that, too. We have to face the war past and have justice. The country must not be a hostage to the past.