

Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative/High Representative for BiH: “My Measures are Achieving the Desired Results”

The IC's High Representative for BiH, Miroslav Lajčák, claims in an interview given to the Serb News Agency /SRNA/ that his 19 October measures are yielding results and they were not the cause of price increases; he announces he will not ignore an agreement reached by the parliamentarians and calls on the Chair of the CoM of BiH «in resignation», Nikola Špirić, to fulfill his obligations.

Interviewer: Nevenko ERIĆ

SARAJEVO, NOVEMBER 24 (SRNA): The High Representative for BiH, Miroslav Lajčák, believes that the measures he adopted on October 19 are achieving the desired results, because local politicians meet and talk about the functionality of the state, which must be a positive thing.

He says that it was deliberate that he did not impose amendments to the Rules of Procedure for the Parliamentary Assembly on 19 October, because he wanted to give some room to local politicians to find a solution.

In his opinion, the solution they come up with cannot be ignored, because they have democratic legitimacy.

«When it comes to the Parliament, I sent a letter on Tuesday to the Collegia of both Houses of the PA in order to express

my support for the inception of this process in the Parliamentary Assembly. It is important to note that there are two things the inclusion of which in the Rules of Procedure is vital – first, the PA Rules of Procedure need to be harmonized with the BiH Constitution, and second, the possibility of blockage of the PA work through absenteeism should be minimized» – Lajčak emphasized.

He warned that any proposal must be supported by both houses of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH.

SRNA: How do you assess the results of the meeting of political party leaders – signatories of the Mostar Declaration, which you attended yourself, and what are the next steps?

LAJČAK: The meeting demonstrated a strong will for urgent resolution of the situation with the BiH CoM and PA. The meeting was not easy, but it is encouraging that it was led by BiH leaders, not the IC or the OHR. Discussions were held about a package of legislation and timelines for police reform, which will put BiH back on the EU road. However, it was more than clear that we need to resolve the political situation in BiH before we can move forward.

Several issues need to be resolved urgently: a new Council of Ministers, Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers, and primarily an agreement on rules of procedure for both Houses of the Parliament. An agreement must be made in order to avoid deepening the current political crisis. Further steps have also been agreed, and we are now going to wait until Tuesday, 27 November, when the Collegia of both Houses of the PA will meet with a view to determining a common position with regard to the Rules of Procedure for the Parliament.

SRNA: You asked the Chair of the CoM of BiH «in resignation», Nikola Špirić, urgently to convene a session of the CoM. Why didn't you also ask his deputies, Tarik Sadović and Dragan

Vrankić, to do the same, when you made it possible with your Decisions?

LAJČAK: Simply – because the goal of my measures is to ensure the presence of the ministers, not their absence. Mr Špirić is entitled to disagree with my Decisions, but he is in a caretaker mandate and has no right to avoid his obligations. BiH and its institutions cannot afford the luxury of not working.

Key legislation is on the CoM's agenda. Already today, citizens expect the CoM to ratify the EU Visa Facilitation Agreement, adopt the Law on Police Officials in order to make it possible for non-certified police officers to apply for jobs, and establish a BiH Fiscal Council and institutions for vocational education and training. The Law on BiH Institutions Budget for 2008 is also on hold, as well as approval of funds for presidential elections in the RS, which will be held on 9 December, appointment of a new director of SIPA and approval of the State Property Agreement.

You cannot convince me that it is normal for a person on whom this all depends not to come to work.

SRNA: You have established an anti-corruption team. Can you explain in concrete terms what the tasks of this team will be? Is it going to conduct investigations into corruption or forward the collected data to responsible judicial authorities? Do you intend – after the legislative and the executive – to intervene in the judicial sphere, too?

LAJČAK: Even before I came to BiH, I was concerned about the information that crime, war criminals and certain political personalities are in collusion.

All I will tell you now is that this team will cooperate closely with local and international institutions to analyze the nature and strength of links between crime, terrorism, war crimes suspect networks and the potential involvement of high-

ranking politicians in Dayton obstruction or in obstructing the legitimate functioning of BiH institutions.

This team will not investigate or prosecute cases. BiH institutions are prepared to conduct independent investigations and prosecute high-profile cases. The rule of law implies that everyone is equal before the law and I believe that responsible BiH politicians share this opinion.

SRNA: Have you completely given up on your participation in police reform – or do you maintain your position that this issue should be initiated by local politicians or you will come up with a new proposal?

LAJČAK: Responsibility for this process is now in the hands of BiH politicians. The international community is here to help. However, the initiative must come from within, from the political leaders of this country. They are responsible for the fact that BiH did not initial the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU and they must find a solution. The EU is ready. Politicians of this country must reach an agreement if they really want BiH to go forward with European integration.

SRNA: Can BiH initial the SAA with the part of the security structure in BiH called the RS Police, with its competencies on the territory of that entity?

LAJČAK: I think the three EU principles on which police reform in BiH must be based are a wide enough framework for solutions which will be acceptable to all.

SRNA: One of the topics, if not the most important one, in the future talks on constitutional change is the territorial organization of BiH. Two options are in circulation: federalization and regionalization. Which option are you in favor of?

LAJČAK: I am in favor of the option on which there is

agreement by all constituent peoples in BiH. There is no one and only right solution. Different states have different constitutional arrangements, and that is the case with the EU countries. Each of them has chosen the model which it believes suits it best. It is up to political leaders in BiH to find a solution which will be good and acceptable for all citizens.

SRNA: Decisions have been made for continuation of EUFOR's and EUPM's mandates. What is the reason for that if it is constantly claimed that the security situation in BiH is stable? Do these decisions have anything to do with the future status of Kosovo?

LAJČAK: The BiH road to the EU and the future status of Kosovo are not linked. BiH is a recognized sovereign state whose territorial integrity is guaranteed by the Dayton Agreement. Those who link the two issues do that for their own political goals, not because they wish BiH well.

It is important to note that all important political leaders expressed their support for continuation of EUFOR's mandate in BiH. EUFOR is a guarantee that political problems will continue being resolved in a safe environment.

I welcome the decision of the UN Security Council to extend EUFOR's mandate. It is another confirmation of the dedication of the international community in BiH. The situation in BiH is stable, and EUFOR will remain here to continue ensuring security and keep being prepared to respond to potential security challenges in the future. Extension of EUFOR's and EUPM's mandates is an opportunity to continue with the excellent cooperation between numerous institutions in BiH.

SRNA: How do you assess the socio-economic situation in BiH after the wave of price escalation which somehow coincided with your latest Decisions? Is the OHR going to undertake something to protect citizens from poverty?

LAJČAK: My Office has made an analysis to obtain accurate

information on the sudden price escalation which directly affects ordinary people.

It is a fact that inflation has risen abruptly, by about 2.7 percent, in the EU. In this region, including Croatia and Serbia, this increase was much more pronounced. The figure has risen to 4.6 percent in BiH, partly because BiH still imports a considerable share of foodstuffs.

However, the difference between BiH, the region and Europe is that functional governments may react in an appropriate way to protect consumers.

So, despite political statements, price escalation has nothing to do with the 19 October measures. The Decisions were intended to increase the functionality of state institutions and that was their only goal.

We have to start resolving concrete issues as soon as possible. BiH urgently needs reforms in order to build itself into a modern and efficient state which can take its place in the EU.

BiH is a state in which half of the population lives on or below the poverty line. Therefore, it urgently needs economic legislation in order to stimulate new jobs and raise the standard of living. This legislation needs to be adopted by the CoM, which, as I said, has not had a single session since 16 October! This is a legal issue for the BiH institutions.

It is time that these issues were resolved. Citizens across BiH face price increases, while politicians in BiH deal with the question whether BiH institutions should be efficient or not.