

Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative/High Representative in BiH: “Dodik is paying the price for his statements”

INTERVIEW: Miroslav Lajčák, the High Representative, Special Representative and a Minister

He does not want to talk about his successor – except to confirm that he will be an EU citizen and someone who is well familiar with the region. He recommends a more precise mandate and specified expectations of PIC, admits that OHR still has work to do in BiH, but that there is no common position as to how and when it should finish it...

Oslobođenje: When did you realise that Bosnia is a dead horse?

Miroslav Lajčák: Bosnia is not a dead horse. When I said that, I was not referring to BiH but to instruments of the international community. I wanted to convey the following message: if OHR exists, then it should have the Bonn powers because neither OHR without full capacity nor the EU with OHR are yielding expected results. I wanted to say that it is not important who represents the international community in BiH, what is important is what PIC wants.

From Wednesday to Friday

Oslobođenje: Why did you change your opinion after 24 hours in Brussels: after the meeting with Ollie Rehn you reiterated the statement about a greater interest of the international community in BiH, only to remain silent after the meeting with Javier Solana and announce the following day that you accepted

the offer of the Slovakian Prime Minister? What happened?

Miroslav Lajčák: It was not like that. I had several meetings in Brussels on Wednesday, both my meetings and those of BiH representatives – I attended the meeting with president Radmanović, and with parliamentarians afterwards. On my way back I travelled via Vienna and Bratislava. On Thursday I got a direct offer from my Prime Minister for the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and that is when I decided: I returned to Sarajevo, and announced my decision on Friday.

Oslobođenje: You have not answered my question: what changed for BiH, so from this tremendous support of the international community you promised, the international community became a dead horse instead?

Miroslav Lajčák: I have a responsibility towards BiH, but also towards my country. When this vacancy appeared, I publicly stated I did not consider myself as a candidate, but when the Prime Minister offered it to me directly I accepted the offer, with an agreement that I will first complete my obligations in BiH. That is why I am still in Sarajevo. It was no secret for my associates that for some time I thought the PIC session at the end of March would be a culmination of my mandate, and that any new decision should be implemented by a new man.

LEGAL TEAMS: Negotiations between two legal teams took place in accordance with a unanimous recommendation by the PIC

Oslobođenje: Why is the March session a culmination: do you too expect the termination of OHR's mandate?

Miroslav Lajčák: PIC stated very clearly that the appointment of my successor and termination of OHR are two separate processes. All conditions have not been fulfilled for termination of OHR. We have seen progress, especially with regard to the status of Brčko, as far as the state property is concerned there is still work to do, and I cannot talk about the pace at which the situation will develop here, because that will depend on the agreement between domestic politicians.

Oslobođenje: You are contradictory: OHR needs the Bonn powers, yet you did not use them?

Miroslav Lajčák: I did, approximately 40 times, but I acted in line with the principle that the Bonn powers are not an instrument I should use to impose a political decision. The Bonn powers should protect the integrity of BiH, the state and its institutions and reforms, and everything else is a matter for compromise and agreement between local politicians. Any imposition of decisions usually provokes a reaction by one side and deepens the distrust, and that is not a solution. We need to be strengthening trust.

Oslobođenje: BiH is today a far more divided country than when you came here.

Miroslav Lajčák: The atmosphere is bad. I think that the situation worsened because we accomplished some success too – primarily, we signed the SAA. There are political forces here that want to block the European road, and that is just an unnecessary waste of time.

Oslobođenje: The last time we spoke, you said Dodik had changed in the last two years. It is no secret that he was the obstacle most often: why did you agree to negotiate with his legal team?

Miroslav Lajčák: Negotiations between two legal teams took place in accordance with a unanimous recommendation by the PIC. The High Representative is an instrument of the international community. Milorad Dodik has made a number of unnecessary and irresponsible statements that aggravate the atmosphere and trust in BiH, complicate the process supported by the international community, but he represents an authentic political force in BiH. And BiH cannot be built without one of its peoples. Instead of demonising Dodik, I think everyone should work on creating an atmosphere of shared responsibility of domestic politicians. That is why I introduced meetings of the six party leaders. Why did this bother some people? Everyone who participated was constructive, and they experienced attacks by people who offered no alternative.

They did not draw any maps

Oslobođenje: Did you train Tihić, so he keeps repeating that sentence constantly? Now, as we know, Ivanić left the group of

six leaders.

Miroslav Lajčák: We now have the Prud process, a meeting between three leaders who want to come to an agreement. It is clear to everyone that this agreement will be difficult to implement, but should they be demonised because they are talking and finding solutions? They are the presidents of their respective parties. The international community supports the philosophy of consensus. Of course, the issues they discuss must go through the parliamentary procedure. In the last three days I had meetings with all three leaders, and I believe what they told me – namely that they did not draw any maps. They did talk about the middle level of government, but...

Oslobođenje: Please, how do you explain the phrase “all entities”, which they keep repeating in their statements?

Miroslav Lajčák: I believe they did not draw any maps, and the BiH Constitution can only be changed through the envisaged procedure. Therefore, even if they were drawing maps – that would not mean anything. Everyone knows that. Let's think of the issues they are discussing as issues that must be discussed. OHR cannot be a screen for local politicians for their failure to act, and that is exactly what it is being used for.

Oslobođenje: To what extent is the Prud process a screen for the international community to simply withdraw?

Miroslav Lajčák: I view the Prud process differently, because I think that consensus is the only way to move forward. The international community unanimously supported Prud.

Oslobođenje: That is why I am asking: the Prud process started just before the last PIC session, thus taking Dodik off its agenda, and this is one of the greatest objections towards Tihić.

Miroslav Lajčák: If the Prud process had not continued, I would have agreed. However, they had two meetings after that, the budget was adopted, they are very close to a solution for Brčko, resolution of the state property issue is underway. Tihić is under attack because he sat down to negotiate with Milorad Dodik and because there is still a prevailing naïve

belief here that the international community will impose a solution in BiH. This is not only naïve, moreover it is defeatist thinking. Does anyone want solutions to be imposed here, which would only further deepen the distrust?

Oslobođenje: How much does Dodik's statement upon his return from Brussels, in which he said he would not allow Muslim judges to try in RS, contribute to that trust?

Miroslav Lajčák: That is contrary to any contribution for BiH, but Milorad Dodik is paying the price for that: ask Mr. Radmanović what they told him in Brussels. BiH has no other perspective except the European one, and when Solana and Rehn are explicit, it certainly bears its weight.

Corruption and justice

Oslobođenje: At the start of 2008 you announced the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Team: on the eve of your departure, could you at least tell us what this team has done?

Miroslav Lajčák: I cannot and I do not want to, because from the very beginning when the team was established, all I can see is a sensationalist approach to this issue. Justice is slow, but it is attainable.