

Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative/High Representative in BiH: “Kosovo’s independence will not cause instability in BiH”

Text of interview with High Representative and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák, as published by Dnevni avaz on 15 February 2008

By Sead Numanovic

“Kosovo’s independence will not cause instability in Bosnia-Hercegovina. There is no potential for this, although I do not rule out that some individuals will seek to abuse this act. I expect politicians to demonstrate responsible behaviour, while the international community will not allow for any instability here. Bosnia-Hercegovina does not depend on Kosovo in any element. Everything is in its hands,” High Representative Miroslav Lajčák has said in an interview with Dnevni Avaz.

He specified that “the fact is that whatever happens in Kosovo has no influence on Bosnia-Hercegovina.”

“Bosnia-Hercegovina is a sovereign, internationally recognized country, and there is no potential to call it into question and cause destabilization,” Lajčák said.

Dnevni Avaz: Yet, SPONA has announced plans to stage protests, and the SDS leaders and the Radicals seek the right to hold a referendum on secession. This in itself destabilizes the situation.

Miroslav Lajčák: I do not want to get into any speculation. Whoever engages in activities directed against the order and stability in BIH will have to bear the consequences.

Dnevni Avaz: Does the international community have the strength for it?

Miroslav Lajčák: No one should doubt the international community's commitment. What I am saying is not the result of my own thinking, but of intensive consultations with representatives of the international community in BIH. This issue must not be toyed with. Period!

Dnevni Avaz: While we are talking about Kosovo, intensive discussions are being held about the abolition of the OHR. Will this happen?

Miroslav Lajčák: Let us get things straight: the OHR is not eternal; it has been clear from the beginning. Its closure was planned as far back as last summer, but it did not happen. We expect that the February meeting of the PIC [Peace Implementation Council] will provide clear guidelines with regard to the OHR's transition and its future, as well as conditions for its closure. The OHR will be succeeded by the Office of the EU Special Representative (EUSR). I can say that we are conducting a very intensive dialogue. The international community should adopt a joint stance at the February session of the PIC.

Dnevni Avaz: Will it happen, considering that Russia is advocating the closure of the OHR?

Miroslav Lajčák: Everyone has the right to their own opinion. However, the consultations I have had this year reflect a deep understanding of both the situation in BIH and the need for a continuing presence of the international community in BIH. I expect that the international community will embrace this kind of strategy for BIH.

Issue of Strategy

Dnevni Avaz: What kind of strategy? What are its elements? The OHR is likely to close down after the signing of the SAA [Stabilization and Association Agreement], achieving full cooperation with the Hague tribunal, reforming the judiciary, passing a new or amending the existing Constitution...

Miroslav Lajčák: It is pointless to enter into a debate about what is being discussed at the level of the PIC member states. Let the discussion end at that level. Any kind of media speculation or controversy in the newspapers over this issue would show a lack of seriousness towards both the international community and BIH.

Dnevni Avaz: The situation in BIH is again getting more and more unstable. The police reform is at a standstill, no agreement has been reached...

Miroslav Lajčák: The process is going on. The Council of Ministers has endorsed police reform laws, and they are now before Parliament. I cannot conceal my disappointment at the fact that the SDA changed its mind during the process. That has harmed the reputation of BIH and the SDA as well. One cannot change sides during a match.

I wish that anything related to the EU would be unequivocally and strongly supported, instead of being an issue where the dividing line between the coalition and the opposition is clearly visible. However, there are five other political parties that are ready and willing to fulfil the promise they made to me and Commissioner Olli Rehn. They want to prove that the project is supported by a majority in Parliament.

Dnevni Avaz: Does that mean that it would be possible to carry out the police reform even without the SDA?

Miroslav Lajčák: That is right, although it would have been much better if those laws, as well as all the others relating

to the EU, had been passed by a majority, or by acclamation, to put it like that, of all political parties in Parliament, because all of them advocate European integration. This issue must not be exploited as a means of interparty strife.

Dnevni Avaz: How do you respond to accusations that the current solutions will not reform the police and that the well-known European principles have been betrayed?

Miroslav Lajčák: But is there an alternative? Has anyone offered a positive alternative? No, they have offered nothing. Neither the European integration nor progress in the police reform. Rejecting everything can only push the country into a crisis. Everyone can sit idly by and criticize others, starting from the EU and the high representative to political partners. But it is better to take steps, to do one's utmost at the given moment, so we could start the process of European integration and continue our efforts towards improving the situation.

I must say that I have no understanding for such behaviour. I have asked Sulejman Tihic on several occasions what it is that he offers. He wants the high representative to impose what he considers appropriate. But that is not the way politics should be conducted in 2008. Moreover, no one has the right to hold the citizens of BIH hostage for the sake of their parties' interests. Nobody can do it, even if they are convinced that they are absolutely right. That can be achieved through other means of political struggle, without sacrificing the country's European future.

Constitutional Changes

Dnevni Avaz: Will the constitutional reform fall victim to political fighting?

Miroslav Lajčák: That simply cannot happen. The constitutional reform is indispensable, but the atmosphere is not yet right for it. Therefore, we must focus on the issues that need to be

addressed today and that is, above all, the process of European integration. As soon as appropriate conditions are created, we can go back to the reform.

Dnevni Avaz: What is your opinion about the conclusions of the SNSD Main Committee?

Miroslav Lajčák: Negative! Although it is their position on the future negotiations on constitutional changes that have not yet begun, this document will not help facilitate the future talks, but will instead make them more difficult. In a number of segments this document represents a direct challenge to the Dayton accord, BIH's integrity and effectiveness. Therefore, I fully reject it!

Anti-Corruption Team To Be Set Up Soon

We are in the final stage of setting up an anti-corruption team. It has not yet been established, and the public will be informed as soon as it is done. Obviously, we are not doing anything in secret, and such rumours are not true. That is not the way we do things. We have nothing to hide. The information about the anti-corruption team will be made public very soon. The members of the team have already been chosen, funds for its work have been provided, and now we are in the final stage. The public will be fully informed about everything in a timely manner.

BIH Is not Bantustan

This country is not Bantustan. I cannot tell whether or not an early parliamentary election will take place. I neither wish nor intend to enter into discussions of that kind. That is a matter for democratic procedures in BIH.

I Condemn Violence in Sarajevo

I welcomed the first protests in Sarajevo against the killing of a teenage boy on a tram. People have realized that they are

not an amorphous mass, objects, but that they can express their will and wishes. What happened on Wednesday [13 February] is regrettable. I condemn the use of violence, and I think that violence cannot be used as a means of protesting against violence. Those who resorted to violence did everything to discredit the idea that inspired the first and second protest. I approve of the citizens expressing their opinions, but am against any form of violence. I cannot think of a single reason to justify such actions.