

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



High Representative and EU Special Representative in BiH Miroslav Lajčák said in an interview with Onasa that his main short-term priority is for BiH to sign Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), noting that police reform is directly linked to that reform.

SARAJEVO, July 26 (ONASA) – The High Representative and EU Special Representative in BiH, Miroslav Lajčák, said in an interview with Onasa that his main short-term priority is for BiH to sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), noting that police reform is directly linked to that reform.

“The majority of issues on police reform have already been agreed, and BiH was very close to an agreement in March. Police reform is now more a technical issue which can and must be resolved quickly, because there is no other priority important for BiH than the European path,” the High Representative said.

“I hope next week to have a response from political leaders on their readiness to work seriously on the issue. We don’t have much time if we intend to make progress during September. It is crucial that BiH does not allow the stalemate

to continue and to itself to fall further behind the rest of the region on the road to the EU.”

The High Representative stressed that the European Union (EU) wants BiH to sign the SAA.

“The EU has finished its part of the job and now we want to see that an agreement can be clinched in BiH. The three European principles are not a limiting factor – the principles provide enough space to enable an agreement to be reached.”

Commenting constitutional change, HR Lajčak noted that a new solution must be found given that the ‘April package’ was not adopted.

“The extent to which a new solution will include the April package depends on BiH politicians. In Europe there are various constitutional systems: unitary states, centralized states, federal states. There is no European standard for internal arrangements. BiH should find a model, which reflects its structure, its nature, the fact that its constitutional architecture is built on three constitutive nations and two entities. In the end we must adopt something, which is acceptable for all. I think we will accomplish nothing if accept or reject anything in advance.”

The High Representative recently set representatives of the authority and political parties in Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (HNK) deadlines within which they must finally appoint a Government. Ten months after the general elections in October the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton is still without a government.

“I met with the heads of the cantonal assembly in the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton on their constant inability to appoint a government. My message was simple: ten months of indolence is too much! In Mostar, as well as at other levels, there is no vision of a normal European future. Politicians

have nailed themselves to their positions despite of the interests of the citizens, ignoring the fact that compromise and dialogue are positive, and not negative sides of politics. I gave them an opportunity to show their maturity.”

“In the twelve years since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed there have been huge changes in Mostar, but not as quickly as we all hoped. Does this mean we should give up? No. The entire country is moving towards the EU, and that includes Mostar.”

HR Lajčak underlined that it is very significant for BiH for non-governmental organizations, such as the Centre for Civic Initiatives, are active, and that they vocal when expressing their views.

“Most people view EU accession as the country’s main priority. The NGO sector exists in order to remind politicians, who would prefer to avoid the difficult decisions necessary for progress toward the EU, of that fact. One of my goals is to strengthen this sector as a means of supporting the countries path to Europe.”

On higher education, the High Representative noted that EU member states have themselves the target of being the most competitive knowledge based economy in the world.

“The EU is investing huge efforts to reach that goal. The EU has agreed with BiH’s authorities that higher education reform should have an exceptionally important place among the other requirements of the European partnership requirements.”

“The law currently before the state parliament is the best possible compromise between BiH’s international requirements and reality of the constitutional and political reality of this country. It creates a legislative framework for continuing higher education reform in BiH, in line with the demands of the Bologna process and the Lisbon convention, which will be applicable both in BiH and outside its borders.

This presents a positive compromise, which can place BiH in the centre of European development. I hope parliament will see this as an exceptional opportunity."

Asked if he will use Bonn powers during his mandate as High Representative, HR Lajčak stressed that these competences are part of his mandate.

" I have accepted my mandate in a whole and I have no right to reject a part of my mandate, particularly such an important part. It is necessary that citizens, domestic politicians and international community representatives take responsibility. We all have our own responsibility towards the future of this country and we should act on that basis."

"I will not hide the fact that I desire success. For me the measure of that success is BiH inside the stabilization and association process, a BiH which is making real progress. Why? Because I believe in the tangible benefits that Europe brings to ordinary people. I know the Slovakian experience from zero integration to full EU integration. I know how positive that is. I also believe that this is possible to reach here, and that Europe and BiH can only benefit from this process," the High Representative concluded.