Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, High Representative / EU Special Representative for BiH: “I have not come here to divide”

Dušan STOJAKOVIĆ, 17 July 2007

Serbs in the RS would be happiest if you would say now that you’ve come here to separate peacefully the RS and the Federation of BiH, following the recipe from Montenegro?

“No way”, says the Slovak diplomat and begins the interview with a broad smile. “Such statements are not serious. I did not go to Montenegro to separate it from Serbia. I went there because the issue of an independence referendum was on the agenda.”

In Serbia and Montenegro, you managed to split one whole into two; how are you going to succeed in piecing together three parts in BiH?

Miroslav Lajčák: My task was to find a European outcome. Such a solution was found and my first mission was a success. Today, Serbia and Montenegro are both on a European path. The tensions that existed before I arrived in Montenegro have disappeared.

Still, some analysts claim that your arrival in BiH, as an expert in the peaceful breakup of state unions, is a message to hardliners in Sarajevo to give up on their extreme demands, because the alternative would be a divorce of the RS and the FBiH.

Miroslav Lajčák: Such assessments are wrong on all counts. I am not a divorce expert but an expert for agreement, and I have come here to play that role. This country must head towards European integration and this will be impossible in the absence of agreements. That's the essence of my presence here.

In this short time you have spent in BiH, have you managed to identify those responsible for the lack of agreement?

Miroslav Lajčák: I believe that the political atmosphere is such that politicians are under no pressure to find compromises. On the contrary, they have been rewarded for the current state of affairs. Maybe am exaggerating slightly, but the electorate has rewarded politicians for not wanting to reach an agreement. However, this country cannot make progress without responsibility and compromise.

You say "politicians"… RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik and the Bosniak Member of the BiH Presidency Haris Silajdžić are not subject to the same pressure …

Miroslav Lajčák: I never said that this was the case.

How did you prepare for coming to BiH – on the basis of prejudice or facts? Do you know that Dodik was in favor of the «April package» of the constitutional reform and in favor of the police reform, while Silajdžić rejected both?

Miroslav Lajčák: I am not influenced by prejudices. I have been present in this area long enough to know that prejudices will not take very far. This is a very sensitive and complex region where you need to remain unbiased and avoid all

clichés. When I stalk of politicians, I have no intention of classifying them into good guys and bad guys – that just would not be serious.

Why don't you want to say openly who blocks agreement?

Miroslav Lajčák: If a Bosniak reporter were sitting next to you now he would say that Silajdžić has accepted everything, and that Dodik has rejected everything. Let us put an end to the blame game. We should stop chasing our own tail. And spell out what we want to do with this country. Let us stop telling each other: "I am good, and you are bad".

Will you use the Draconian "Bonn powers"?

Miroslav Lajčák: My mandate defines my powers. I have already shown that I will use them.

What is your comment on the the fact that 80% of "blacklisted" people are Serbs?

Miroslav Lajčák: Last week when I was deciding on the removal of a police official and the seizure of passports, the last thing I thought about was their ethnicity.

You wielded the stick in deciding on the removal ; will you also try the carrot?

Miroslav Lajčák: The carrot is the European future of this country. That is an attractive offer.

There is a problem when it comes to that European future, because it has never been said when it is supposed to come. We are asked to give up all sorts of things, and yet who knows when and whether we will ever get what you are "offering"…

Miroslav Lajčák: It is our goal to develop BiH as a modern and prosperous European country. One needs to identify what has to be done and then do it as soon as possible. No deadlines have been given to anybody; progress will depend on the efforts of

each country.

Will the international community have a say in the restructuring of BiH?

Miroslav Lajčák: It is my task to ensure that Dayton and the country's Constitution are complied with.

I am something like a football referee. The game has its rules, and I have yellow and red cards and I take care that the game is played by the rules. But it is not my task to score goals.

How far do efforts to resolve the status of the southern Serbian province affect the situation in BiH?

Miroslav Lajčák: I accept no speculations on any direct links between Kosovo and Bosnia, because the issue of Kosovo has its own history and its own problem-solving mechanism. BiH has its tasks and a plan on how it should move on, and the issue of Kosovo is not part of that plan. Sometimes it seems to me that Kosovo is an excuse for the failure to resolve domestic problems here.

Would a unilateral and hurried solution for the southern Serbian province, without agreement and compromise, have any influence on BiH?

Miroslav Lajčák: A hurried solution is never a good solution, which is why I expect that a solution be found that will include as much compromise and consensus as possible.

How big is your salary?

Miroslav Lajčák: I have not yet received my first salary.

You have not inquired about the conditions before you accepted the job?

Miroslav Lajčák: No. I am here on trust.