Interview: Miroslav Lajčák, High Representative / EU Special Representative for BiH: “I won’t write a book about BiH”

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Interview with Miroslav Lajčak

The latest «last high representative» in an exclusive interview to the DANI speaks about police reform, constitutional reform, local political leaders, Croatian language TV channel…

I will not write a book about Bosnia

Interviewer: Vildana Selimbegovic

DANI: Mr. Lajčak your performance in Bosnia seems very energetic. You have recently set very precise deadlines for agreement on police reform. You first said that everything has to be completed by September, but at some later stage you denied your own statements. Why? Have you realized, in the meantime, that police reform agreement will not be reached by the foreseen deadline?

LAJČAK: I am not aware of any denial of my own statements. I always insist on my original statement – we have to complete it in September. I have never given up on this. I just said that it is not a formal deadline imposed by anybody. I also said that all we need is a political agreement based upon compromise. We do not need six months for that. We are either ready or not. I also explained why we have to do it in September. The end of September is the last deadline for information to be included in the European Commission Annual Report and the time when preparations of the next PIC Steering Board session begin – if we miss September, we will lose an entire year. And we do not need that. Maybe the problem lies in the fact that as soon as I mentioned September as our deadline to reach agreement, some kind of research was launched immediately – to establish who imposed the deadline. I, therefore, explained that it is not any kind of formally imposed deadline. I, however, still firmly believe that we have to finish the job in September. I have never given up on it. I take all my actions with this schedule in mind, so we can have police reform agreed in September.

DANI: **Indeed, you insist on this very much. What if it does not happen after all?**

LAJČAK: I do not think in categories such as "what if it does not happen".

DANI: **Do you have a Plan B?**

LAJČAK: Plan B is stagnation. And isolation. And losing the momentum. So, I simply do not deal with plan B. People need to accept responsibility here and politicians need to show wisdom to reach a compromise. Why? Because this is a requirement that the EU will not give renounce and there is no reason to give it up, as Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to come closer to the European Union. Bosnia and Herzegovina has to resolve this problem. It's a clear requirement for signing the agreement. The signature is one in a series of steps. We do not have an

alternative. If we cannot resolve the issue today, what are the chances that we will reach agreement in November or January? None. We will come to a halt and head straight into isolation.

DANI: According to statements of local politicians we have stopped anyway. Both the Bosniak and the Serb side have taken very strong positions. Where will you look for compromise?

LAJČAK: We are looking for a compromise within three European principles; I have had discussions will all leading politicians in this country and all of them are aware of the three defined principles that leave room for agreement, and all support my intention to seek and find answers within these principles.

DANI: Mr. Lajčak, what is your position: Can RS MUP continue to exist after the verdict of the International Court of Justice in the Hague?

LAJČAK: These are two different things within one issue. The verdict of the International Court of Justice in the Hague is clear and the same goes for its conclusions. Police reform is another issue. Of course, all issues are mutually related. On the other hand, we should not be looking for some artificial linkages. The objective of the police reform is, of course, to have functional police, which is the requirement for this country on its path to Europe; it is a path that does not have an alternative. I have seen some attempts to include Constitutional reform into police reform and thereby introduce Constitutional reform by the back door. If we link the International Court of Justice and its verdict with police reform we will end up with some kind of "goulash" – it will be impossible to make a step forward. So let's resolve each issue separately, as it should be done.

DANI: You are aware that the RS MUP was labelled in that judgment as responsible for the genocide in Srebrenica and

having committed severe war crimes on the remaining territory of BiH. So, this is my reason why I am asking you for your position on the RS MUP or on its further existence. But I believe there are other arguments for asking this question: what kind of police reform are we talking about in the first place if the precondition is to preserve the RS MUP, i.e. the police which recently let Radovan Stanković walk out of a prison, out of Foča and out of the entity?

LAJČAK: Did the International Court of Justice request by its judgment that the RS MUP be abolished?

DANI: Do you believe it should stay because the International Court of Justice did not request that?

LAJČAK: It is not important what I think. The important thing is that all those who are responsible and who committed the crimes are called to account for their actions. That is important, and that is one of my priorities. That is what I work on. But, let's resolve issues one by one, because if we put everything into one goulash we will be totally lost. The International Court of Justice has made its judgment. It has its legal consequences; it has its moral consequences. I said there is no running away from responsibility. Anyone who is guilty must face justice, must bear responsibility, and the names of all those who are on the Srebrenica list and are not found to be responsible should be cleared. This is the reason why I took some steps in that direction. This is one thing, and there is no justice without truth and there is no reconciliation without justice, and there is no future without reconciliation. That is clear, and the police reform is a technical issue that needs to be resolved as a technical issue. And the constitutional reform is another important political issue that we will resolve later or begin resolving straight after the solution to the police reform.

DANI: I was just about to ask about the constitutional reform. You keep pointing out that it is an issue for domestic

politics. Can BiH join the EU without constitutional reform? If not – and you insist on agreement to be made by local politicians, who, as you could see for yourself, do not want to or can agree – it will have to be done by the international community.

LAJČAK: The question is a little suggestive but I will try to give you an objective reply. Constitutional reform is much needed, above all, for this country. It is on the list of 27 conditions or issues that need to be resolved in the course of the preparations for European integration. Let us be clear, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it is today, is a state that is not very efficient and too expensive. Everyone accepts that. BiH is a country with fewer than four million people and yet is has 14 governments and as many parliaments, it has…

DANI: Four hundred ministers, and each of them with at least three advisors, a secretary, a driver…

LAJČAK: Yes. We all understand each other on that point. In the process of European integrations a country must fulfil the requirements of this process, for example the parliaments must be able to pass hundreds, thousands of regulations, and with the current efficiency demonstrated by both the Council of Ministers and the Parliament that will be a mission impossible. It is not as if someone is saying that BiH cannot get into the EU with the existing constitution, that is not a formal opinion, but this is quite clear: in order to get into the EU, this country must function as a modern, efficient and effective state. The constitutional reform is necessary in that sense. Secondly: yes, I say it has to be a result of consensus. We are the international community, we have our obligations and are well aware of that. We are not observers, especially me as the high representative, I cannot be an observer. What I want to say is this: we are here, we are a part of the game and we will play our role. There are many international agencies providing assistance here, because you do not live in a vacuum. However, by saying that this reform

must be a domestic product, I want to say that our goal is not to impose the Constitution. We are here to help, both politically and in terms of expert assistance. Many things have already been done and prepared, but in order for a country to respect and uphold its Constitution, it must be adopted by its own forces.

DANI: Mr. Lajčak, you heard Milorad Dodik's most recent threats of a referendum. How will you react? Will you let him threaten the entire country with disintegration, just like your predecessor did, until the U.S. ambassador goes to Banja Luka, just like he did on the eve of elections, to stand behind Dodik's back waiting for him to admit, in front of journalists, the sovereignty of the country he lives in?

LAJČAK: I believe that Prime Minister Dodik sometimes speaks first, and only starts thinking afterwards. That is his style. It is not my style. On the other hand, I have a mandate here. I do not think it is within my mandate nor that it would be good for my successful work to react publicly to all nonsense uttered by politicians, and there is a lot of it. I would have no time to do anything else. I prefer to work by discussing my opinions or my criticism with them directly, face to face, as I do. Let us not forget that Milorad Dodik is a legitimately elected politician, the Prime Minister of the RS Government.

DANI: No one is disputing that.

LAJČAK: He is one of the crucial political figures in this country and one of the crucial factors in order to achieve everything that this country needs. As for conveying messages to each other through the media, calling names and pointing fingers, I will never get involved in such things and I am working on limiting such communication between your politicians as well.

DANI: What will you do in respect of calls for a reshuffle in the Council of Ministers? In other words: will you do

anything?

LAJČAK: I do not feel at all that I should get involved in the discussion regarding a reshuffle, but I expect and ask the Council of Ministers to do its job, and to do it better than it has done so far.

DANI: Significantly better?

LAJČAK: Much better. That's another topic of my discussions. I have regular meetings with Mr. Špirić and I meet with members of the Council of Ministers. I regularly tell them what I expect from them, what they must do, and I certainly do not expect from them to engage in mutual accusations in the media. They are on vacation now, and they should be resting.

DANI: I apologise, but judging from the results of their work – they have been resting ever since they were elected.

LAJČAK: It is also good for us to take a break from such unnecessary politics. They have other things they should be dealing with, instead of accusing each other through the media. I do not want to go into the issue of whether they will change the composition of the CoM or not, but I am very interested in the results of their work.

DANI: You have, so to say, a very principled position when rejecting the possibility of a separate Croat-language television channel. Why haven't you applied the same vigorous energy in police reform so far?

LAJČAK: I do apply it. Every day I dedicate several hours of my work schedule to police reform. I have had numerous meetings and talks with your politicians about this issue. I think that in this phase it is not necessary or productive to conduct this discussion in the media – actually I think it is very counterproductive. I want us to maintain, as much as possible, the level of talks that will lead us to our final goal; in fact, I can say that police reform has been taking up

most of my energy so far, although one cannot see that from an outside perspective.

DANI: This is why I am asking. There is a general impression in the public, with this example of efficient rejection of any discussion of a TV channel, that you prioritised the Bosniak-Serb consensus, ignoring the Croat factor, maybe due to the fact that the Croats are a minority, albeit a constituent people in BiH. Let me remind you that shortly before your arrival to Sarajevo, Silajdžić and Dodik were invited to Washington for a *political briefing,* while no representatives of the Croat political parties were invited. Do you even think about that?

LAJČAK: It is natural that I think about it. I say again and again that three constituent peoples live in this country. I have a very lively dialogue with leaders of Croat political parties in the most diverse ways – we are often on the phone to each other, we see each other. That is one thing. Secondly, and I have said this several times, I really believe that, as a matter of fact, the Croats, instead of complaining they are the least numerous, enjoy a special status which arises from the fact that they are the least numerous group and they can use it. They can initiate certain proposals or initiatives because they are not subject to the kind of suspicion that is more visible in relations between the Serb and Bosniak ethnic groups. As for the Croat television channel I reacted they way I did not because I do not want Croat people to watch television in Croat language but because the way this matter has been addressed is not serious and that is one thing I cannot tolerate. They say one thing and, actually, the activities underway only undermine a particular law, a concept that already exists. Things they say, things they do are not conducive to the creation of a third channel. It is destructive. Instead of sitting down and talking about what we can be done so that the Croats feel less discontent, what we should do so that they perceive the Federation TV as their TV,

since I believe that is the way to yield results, current activities are designed to earn cheap popularity and they are, in reality, destructive.

DANI: Your predecessors ostentatiously announced their tasks, they talked about European principles, their priorities and once they departed they wrote books, established non-governmental organisations and have gone on record with serious criticism of the policy of the International Community here, the Dayton Constitution, the approach towards BiH. What are your priorities and what is your assessment of how far they can be achieved?

LAJČAK: I am of course familiar with the achievements of my predecessors. During my preparations, as you know, I met four of five of my predecessors. We talked business. They all tried to assist this country and I have no doubts about it. They all worked in a particular time and specific historical circumstances. Of course, at the end of your mandate you may distance yourself a bit from what you have done because you are here engaged in daily politics and perhaps looking back you come to understand that you could have done some things in a different manner. However there is no way back. I came here to carry on what I inherited. I am grateful to my predecessors for some things, some create me problems. It is pointless to speculate about it. Both the country and I are where we are and we should solve problems. But I may draw on this question to say that I will definitely write no book after I finish my mandate. I will certainly not. I truly believe that, thanks to this office, I have both exclusive information and exclusive contacts. Nevertheless I do not want to use them for my personal popularity, to promote myself, it would not be serious approach to my job. I am a diplomat, not only career-wise but also in the way of thinking, methods, and hence I believe that I should keep for myself a lot of what I know or I should use it for the benefit of this country.

DANI: You did not tell me your priorities and whether you

believe that they are achievable?

LAJČAK: My priorities are, firstly, police reform, which should be solved immediately so as to focus on two issues of strategic importance for this country – European integration and constitutional reform. The first issue should be solved right away while we should tackle the second and the third issue with as much effort as possible. It is a process of no return, without ambiguous interpretations, so that everyone can understand that this country is on the right path. The next priority is, of course, truth, justice, facing the past. That's something this country needs badly. These are my key principles. Of course, I have a series of concrete tasks but that is the framework I want to achieve: by the time I leave this country, there must be no doubt that BiH is on the path to becoming a modern, European, politically stable, economically prosperous, democratic country.

DANI: What success percentage do you give yourself?

LAJČAK: I do not give myself any success percentages. I simply think about what should be done and there are always some things.

DANI: What is the percentage of tasks you think you are going to accomplish?

LAJČAK: I am a perfectionist; I always go for 100 per cent.

DANI: So it does seem you have something in common with Silajdžić.