

Press Conference Statement by the High Representative and EU Special Representative in BiH, Miroslav Lajčák after the meeting with NGO representatives



OHR/EUSR Director of Communications, Frane Maroevic:

Good afternoon and welcome. As you know, today the High Representative met with the representatives of three non-governmental organizations who presented him with the conclusions that were reached at the round table discussion held on the subject of whether Bosnia and Herzegovina wants integration or isolation. They briefly talked about the conclusions that were reached, therefore I would like to ask the High Representative to tell you some more about this meeting, following which one of the participants of the meeting will also address you.

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

Thank you. Good afternoon. I see we have a large turnout today, which means you must be expecting some sort of sensational news. However, I have nothing sensational for you.

I am pleased that I had the opportunity today to meet with my partners, the representatives of the civil society. I am a man who firmly believes in the role of the civil society in a democratic society. I consider that for every democratic government and every political party the existence of a democratic society is an absolute necessity. A democratic society should serve as the measure of success for political parties, as a sort of barometer and as kind of mirror, and it is in this sense that I support the activities undertaken by the civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is for this reason that I met with the representatives of the civil society today. They provided an explicit answer to the question whether Bosnia and Herzegovina wishes to chose isolation or integration. Their response was to hold a round table discussion whose title already contained the answer – «we have chosen integration». Today we talked about the conclusions they reached and about what needs to be done in order to strengthen the civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I am pleased that I have the support of the representatives of the civil society. It would have been good if the political party leaders had also organized a round table discussion and in the same manner simply chosen integration. I think that all of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina would have strongly supported and commended such an act. However, we will see what happens by the end of this week in relation to that.

Thank you. That would be all I have to say.

President of the Serb Civic Council – The Movement for Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mirko Pejanović:

Thank you. Good afternoon. It is my pleasure to greet you all on behalf of professor Hadžović, the president of the Council of the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals (VKBI), Fra Luka Markešić, the president of the Croat National Council (HNV)

and of course, on my behalf, the president of the Serb Civic Council (SGV). First of all I would like to say that we were honored, after having expressed our interest to do so, to have the opportunity to talk with the High Representative, Mr. Lajčák on the subject of police reform, which for a long time now has been the topic of all topics and the question of all question in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We talked briefly. We presented Mr. Lajčák with the main points of the conclusion reached at the round table discussion held by these three non-governmental organizations. Before I set out those points I would just like to say that we also acquainted the High Representative with our perennial experience of working together and initiating various issues and projects that were met with much resistance from society and the political structures in particular, yet in the end were accepted and became part of the successes of this country – for example, achieving constitutional equality and constituency of the peoples in the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There were many skeptics and the idea was met with much opposition, yet in the end it was accepted by the Constitutional Court and became an integral part of the constitutions of both entities, and was also recognized as one of the positive moves made by Bosnia and Herzegovina towards gaining membership in the Council of Europe.

We reached consensus on the following conclusions at the round table discussion: Firstly, we concluded and warn that the social, economic and political state, as well as the overall state of mind and spirit of Bosnia and Herzegovina has significantly deteriorated over the last year and since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement the situation in the country in that sense has never been worse. If the situation does not improve the result may be uncontrollable actions and the overall stability of the country, the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement and peace stabilization will be threatened and undermined.

Our second conclusion was that the Police Reform Protocol proposed by the High Representative, Mr. Lajčák represents a good and sound basis for reaching a solution that would allow Bosnia and Herzegovina to cross its most important threshold in the post-war development of the country, which is signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement, that is joining the European Union.

Our next, that is third conclusion was that police reform is a strategic issue for both the citizens and the country. It is a strategic issue because whether the integration process will advance or will come to a complete halt depends on it. If it does come to a halt Bosnia and Herzegovina risks entering a state and period that would be extremely unfavorable for all of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. What we have learned from our civil activities is that the majority of citizens want Bosnia and Herzegovina to successfully complete the Stabilization and Association Process, that is for the country to successfully advance towards European integration.

We also reached two more conclusions. One is an appeal to all political parties that form the majority in Parliament and have the power to decide whether progress will be made or not, to reach a consensus and accept the High Representative's protocol and by doing so enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to have the opportunity for further development and allow the citizens of this country to believe in the possibility of European integration and the development of this country.

Finally, our last conclusion, which we reiterated to Mr. Lajčák today, was that having in mind the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina we expect the High Representative, and would fully support him if he did so, to take all measures and actions available to him and which he is authorized to take as the High Representative of the International Community and the EU Special Representative in order to ensure that the police reform project succeeds and that the parties in Parliament

reach an agreement, and also in order for that agreement to be accepted by the Peace Implementation Council.

Lastly, our final conclusion means the following – if someone has to be punished let it not be the citizens. Those in power, who have been elected to government should be punished as they are the ones responsible. If they are not able to responsibly perform their duties, then the High Representative must undertake radical measures on behalf of the international community in order to prevent further stagnation.

Thank you.

Questions & Answers

Nezavisne Novine, Rubina ČengiĆ:

A question for Mr. Lajčák. Today a new round of negotiations on police reform will begin. You have received support from the, it can be said, most powerful political non-governmental organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. How much longer will the negotiations continue? On the 15th of October you are going to Brussels. If the negotiations are not successful what will you suggest in Brussels? Do you think that you will succeed by the 15th?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

The question is not whether I will succeed or not. The question is will you succeed and will your politicians assist you in doing so or not. On the 15th of October the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European Union will convene. At the meeting they will reach conclusions in relation to Bosnia and Herzegovina and present their political position, which will reflect the situation here either in a positive or negative sense.

Of course, there is life after the 15th of October. If your politicians succeed in getting their act together and reach an agreement on this issue, an issue that has the complete support of all BiH citizens and about which it appears, or at least so they claim, they have no dilemmas, then we will have succeeded in getting on board and Bosnia and Herzegovina will join its neighbors. However, if conceit prevails again, and there is a lot of that going on, and they continue to mistrust their partners with whom they formed the governing coalition, and continue to treat each other as their worst enemies, and if they keep doubting the international community, which they do although I see no reason for this as the international community is extremely serious, fair, direct and is not playing any games, well then your politicians have decided that you do not deserve to be on the same platform as your neighbors.

However, I repeat – this is not my battle, it is their battle and therefore you should pose this question to them. I am giving them an additional round of negotiations, an additional chance and it is their responsibility and their decision, and of course they are the ones who will have to deal with the consequences.

Dnevni List, Rešad Dautefendić:

I am not sure who can answer my question, the High Representative or one of his guests? Have you informed Mr. Lajčák that your politicians do not acknowledge the opinions of non-governmental organizations?

President of the Serb Civic Council, Mirko Pejanović:

Well, we never actually talked about that issue concretely. However, let me remind you of what I said when I began presenting the conclusions of the round table discussion and that is that various civil activities were conducted and positions were taken by non-governmental agencies that were

met with resistance from the majority of political parties. The longer an activity lasted the more the pressure that was exerted by the civil society and democratic public that was formed mainly by the media increased and the decisions became reality and were accepted by all of the political parties.

Let us look back to when the idea of all three peoples having a constituent status in the entire country was first advocated, we can all remember how many opponents and how much resistance it was met with at the time. Yet, look how many of them, holders of public office and members of political parties, now not only advocate this idea but also receive extremely high salaries because of it.

Oslobođenje, Antonio Prlenda:

Mr. Lajčák, in relation to the meeting in Brussels there have been reports that the Contact Group will also hold its meeting then and there. Could you tell us if such a meeting will take place and how is it different to the before mentioned meeting? What do you expect from such a meeting?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

Of course, there will be a range of meetings. The Contact Group will hold its own meetings. For some time now the Contact Group has also been addressing the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina and this, of course, is not a good thing. The meeting that will be held on the 15th of October is the regular meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers and the General Affairs Council. It is expected that amongst other things they will also reach conclusions concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina at this meeting.