

Press Conference by the High Representative Miroslav Lajčák, following the PIC meeting, Sarajevo, 31 October 2007

OHR, Frane Maroevic:

Good afternoon and welcome. I would first like to apologize for the delay, as the meeting went on a little longer than was expected. Now, without further delay the High Representative will briefly fill you in on what went on during these last two days at the session of the Peace Implementation Council.

High Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

Good afternoon. I also apologize. As you know, I am not in the habit of making you wait. The reasons for this delay are justifiable. Just a few moments ago the session of the Political Directors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board ended. You are aware that I called for a serious and responsible discussion, and indeed that is what I got. I am therefore satisfied with both the discussion and the results of the discussion.

I called for a serious discussion as the situation in the country is serious. I am pleased that it is absolutely clear from the discussions we held that all of the Peace Implementation Council member states are well of aware of that fact.

In that sense the meeting was held at the right time in order for the political directors to become acquainted with just how complicated and severe the situation in the country is.

I can say that all of the PIC member states fully support the Dayton Peace Agreement and in that sense I, as their High Representative, received their complete support.

Their position concerning the analysis of the current situation is the same; they agree that it is necessary to strengthen the state institutions and that the measures I took are completely in accordance with the Dayton Peace Agreement.

As stated in the Declaration of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council, which you will receive following the end of this press conference, as soon as the translation is complete, Decisions of the High Representative must be fully respected and any violation of the High Representative's Decisions will be perceived as an anti-Dayton activity.

Everything I am talking about here is reflected in the PIC communiqué, hence I am pleased with the text of the communiqué and think that the document's message will be absolutely clear to anyone who reads the document.

With regard to the measures I undertook on the 19 October I would like to emphasize that all of the delegations, without exception, agreed that my measures were legitimate and fully in line with my mandate and the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Only one country had a different view regarding the political context of these measures. That is their right and I would certainly not wish to make a sensation out of it.

All PIC member states agree that due to the lack of progress on key reforms, a focus on completing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, including efforts to tackle the evident dysfunctionality of state institutions, is necessary. The PIC Steering Board fully supports this approach.

The PIC Steering Board reiterates that it will not remain passive in the face of provocative statements or acts. Any BiH political leaders or institutions that challenge the High Representative and the PIC Steering Board will be subject to appropriate measures. The Steering Board underlines that the international community retains all the necessary instruments to counter destructive tendencies and that it will not allow attempts to undermine the Dayton Peace Agreement, whether from inside or outside the country.

The Steering Board calls upon Serbia, a Dayton signatory, as well as the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially those in Republika Srpska, to abide by their obligations under international law to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) by playing a proactive role in apprehending all remaining indictees, including Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, and without further delay, dismantling the networks offering support to such fugitives, and ensuring they are transferred to the ICTY.

Now, some more about the program of the meeting. We had several opportunities to talk with the members of the Peace Implementation Council. Yesterday we also met with the leaders of the political parties that form the governing coalition.

This was an opportunity for the politicians to demonstrate to the Peace Implementation Council how they can jointly contribute to leading this country forward on the road to Europe.

It is positive that everyone expressed their commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's European future.

The Peace Implementation Council members commended the fact that, last weekend in Mostar, the members of the governing coalition signed a Declaration on Assuming Responsibility for the Implementation of Police Reform as a precondition for opening BiH's road to Europe.

Everyone agreed that that was a positive step forward, but that only if the political leaders follow-up with concrete actions will it be possible for Bosnia and Herzegovina to progress towards signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

In other words, it is a good step in the right direction. If we continue along this path then the results will soon be evident. However, if we do not move forward in this direction then neither will there be any progress on the road to Europe. Therefore, it is up to our, that is your politicians now. It is their decision. We are ready.

Today we heard the positions of the members of the Council of Ministers of BiH.

Personally, I was disappointed by the speech given by the Chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers, Mr. Špirić and his announcement that he may hand in his resignation. It was over-emotional, irresponsible and insufficiently rational.

Since the beginning of my mandate, at the regular meeting I held every week with Chairman Špirić he repeatedly complained about the functioning of the Council of Ministers and asked for my help.

Unlike the Decisions I passed, his views on the functionality of the Council are not in line with the BiH Constitution.

It is his prerogative to resign, however it would be completely irresponsible and inappropriate for him to do so.

It is a paradox that the reason the Chairman of the Council of Ministers is considering resigning is because he opposes measures that enable the more efficient functioning of the body over which he presides.

We need to put the situation into context.

The Decisions I passed are in the best interest of all BiH citizens and all constituent peoples. The only people who may have a problem with the Decisions are those who do not care whether the institutions of this country function properly and effectively or not. In that sense, the members of the Council of Ministers clearly expressed their support for my measures.

The only objective of these measures is to streamline the decision-making process in the Council of Ministers in order to enable the more effective and faster adoption of laws necessary for BiH to progress on the road to Europe.

Once again I would like to repeat that the reactions to my Decisions were disproportionate and have created a superficial political crisis that could block any form of progress, which I believe is in no one's interest.

We have commenced talks with legal experts in order to explain and clear up any possible misunderstandings. We will resume those talks; in fact we will resume them here in this building right after this press conference. We are willing to come to a legal solution that will ultimately be crystal clear, and that will remove all doubt.

What we must focus on now is the progress and future of this country. It is necessary for the Dayton road to become the main topic of political debate.

On that road you have the unanimous support of all of the PIC member states and all the EU member states.

So, what next? We now have to continue doing serious work, the aim of which is to improve the functioning of the state of BiH for the benefit of its citizens.

We have a lot to do. There is no need for me to convince you of this, you know this better than I do.

Above all I hope the local politicians will now seriously work on the realization of the conclusions reached in Mostar. As I said, the Mostar Declaration is a good step forward, but is not sufficient unless it is followed-up by concrete steps, primarily the commencement of drafting the laws the politicians agreed on.

The European Union accepted the politicians' proposal, the message sent from Mostar. However, the message now needs to be translated into concrete facts.

Concerning the Decisions I passed on the 19 October, allow me to answer the question that I am sure would be asked first. I, of course, stand by my positions, they remain unaltered. The Decisions are in the best interests of the citizens of this country, they are fully in line with the Dayton Peace Agreement and my

mandate. Therefore I am not even considering changing, withdrawing or suspending those Decisions.

I have said this many times before and I say it again, I am willing to clear up all and any misunderstandings and doubts anyone may have in relation to my Decisions, so that it will be absolutely clear that the Decisions are fully in line with the principles of the BiH Constitution, and respect the constitutional guarantees protecting entity and national interests of all people in this country.

In that sense we are serious and expect the same from our partners. The next opportunity for this to be confirmed will occur shortly in this building.

Well, that was what I wanted to share with you concerning the PIC session. I think that once you have had the opportunity to read the document you will see that it confirms all of what I have said today.

RTQs:

RTRS, Gvozden Šarac:

How did, in fact did the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board comment on the Declaration of the RS National Assembly, which was almost unanimously adopted, and concerns your measures? What position will you take and what position will the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board take in relation to the announcements and clear message that unless you take a step back the representatives of the SNSD (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats) will withdraw from all executive and legislative bodies at state level?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

First of all, that is blackmail. I will not be affected by threats and blackmail. Secondly, we did not discuss that document. Once again I would like to reiterate that all of the PIC members confirmed that my decisions were fully in line with my mandate and the Dayton peace Agreement. That is crucial and it is clear.

It would be better if people in this country did their job, concentrated on their own work. It is interesting that when we were working on police reform everyone here saw it fit to interpret the European principles themselves, and today they are all interpreting the Dayton Peace Agreement. I think that both those subjects are my mandate, and the politicians have a different mandate – to do their jobs, to go to work and fulfill the commitments and obligations they have undertaken.

I assume you are all acquainted with the speech given by Mr. Terry Davis, the General Secretary of the Council of Europe, in which he talks about many concrete problems, obligations that this country accepted but never fulfilled. I would therefore recommend that they leave the interpretation of the Dayton Peace Agreement to me and the members of the Peace Implementation Council, and instead get on with their work and their responsibilities towards the citizens of this country.

I am open to dialogue. I am a responsible man. However, let no one try to blackmail me.

Večernje Novosti, Dušan Stojaković:

I would like to know what the OHR is prepared to do if the representatives of Republica Srpska withdraw from the BiH joint institutions?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

We have the constitutional framework of this country.

Dnevni avaz, Tarik Lazović:

Could you tell me more precise whether the Mostar Declaration will be sufficient for the initialling of the Stabilization and Association Agreement? If not, what will be enough?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

I could not be more precise even if I wanted to, as it is absolutely clear that until the political situation is normalized there can be no talk of progress towards European integration. In that sense I have already said that the message from Mostar was well and positively accepted in Brussels, and they are prepared to seriously consider it there. However, what we expect and want to see is first of all, the normalization of the political situation and secondly, the continuation of steps that will move BiH forward on the road to Europe.

BHT 1, Svjetlana Todorović:

I have two questions. First of all, considering that the withdrawal of the SNSD (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats) from all executive and legislative bodies in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a part of the Declaration of the RS National Assembly, do you consider that they are softening their position? In other words, is the SNSD using the Declaration as an excuse not to deliver on the promises they made to the people immediately after you passed your decisions?

Secondly, why is it necessary to continue the talks with the legal experts from Republica Srpska bearing in mind that the Peace Implementation Council deemed your decisions as indisputable and you yourself said that you will not change them? Why waste time and energy on that and risk further confusing the public?

OHR/EUSR:

Svjetlana, I did not understand your first question.

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

I understood. However, you already know what my answer is. I do not answer "what if" questions. I only deal with concrete situations. Therefore, I will not be pulled into a discussion based on conjecture and speculation.

Secondly, I do not and never have thought that it is a waste of energy to clear things up. I am always willing to do so. I do not want to play any games, I have not time for that. However, I believe that certain misunderstandings still exist. I am aware of the distrust, I am aware the country is overburdened with history and so on. Therefore, I am allowing the representatives of Republica Srpska the right to have more questions and I am willing to answer them, to explain and clarify everything. However, as I already said, I want us to reach the point when

everyone will admit that no fact exists that could confirm that there is anything in my measures that is aimed against someone, and that the measures are positive and absolutely necessary for this country. And that is why I am here.

Oslobođenje, Antonio Prleđa:

Regarding the fact that over these last few days you have been the target of criticism from the representatives of the Russian Federation, have you received any guarantees that they will not continue to use such rhetoric in the future?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

Russia has its own political position and political interests. That is a fact, and I respect that. I have no intention nor ambition to attempt to change the direction of the Russian foreign policy. It is crucial for us to deal with the facts, and the facts are that I have a mandate here and that everything I am doing is fully in line with that mandate.

Reuters, Darija Šito-Sučić:

I would just like to extend on Antonio's question. You mentioned that that all of the ambassadors fully supported your measures, except for one country, which objected to the political dimensions of your decisions. Could you please explain exactly what that means? Which country and what does that mean?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

Everything is clearly stated in the communiqué and I do not have a problem with the fact that one country expressed a different political view on one aspect of my decisions. I do not see that as a problem and there is certainly nothing sensational about that. You will have the opportunity to read the document later.

TV OBN, Almir Šarenkapa:

When there is talk about your authorizations then everyone wants to know whether you will remove someone from office. I would like to ask you whether you have the authorization to fill in, that is appoint persons to the posts that will be vacant if the RS politicians withdraw from the posts they currently hold?

My second question is can you confirm that Russia is in fact the country had objections to certain aspects of your decisions? You have not stated this openly.

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

Well, in my opinion, that logic is completely foul. I did not come here to demonstrate my authorizations. However, when we were working on police reform what did the politicians keep saying? "Lajčák has no authorization as the EU Special Representative. He can only advise us. We can ignore him." And then they say that Dayton is my mandate. Then I hear that I am being called a dictator and undemocratic. Well, I am none of these things. I have my mandate, my responsibilities and my only aim is for Bosnia and Herzegovina to no longer be where it is today, at the very bottom of Europe. Instead of speculating, accusing one another and creating artificial manipulated campaigns, such as those we have witnessed in the last few days, we need to really start doing normal work that will

move this country forward. I cannot understand how someone cannot comprehend this.

Nezavisne novine, Mirza Ćubura:

You said that you received support for strengthening the state institutions. What measures will you undertake in order to strengthen the state institutions?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

I have always said and thought that the best solution for everything, for solving today's and tomorrow's problems, including the strengthening of the state institutions, is for this country to seriously move forward on the road to Europe. Therefore I support all efforts in that direction. I do not think that repressive measures are the answer, however they are part of my mandate, which as you know I have fully accepted.

Once again I would like to express my wish and hope that we will all, above all else the local politicians, now devote more time to European integrations and the obligations set before Bosnia and Herzegovina on that road.

Agence France Presse, Amra Hadžiosmanović:

A moment ago, in answer to the question what will you do if the members of the SNSD really do withdraw from their posts, as they announced they would, you said that your response would be based on the constitutional framework of this country? Could you please explain that or list the options?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

I cannot. There are hundreds of options.

RTRS, Radovan Škipina:

Mr. Lajčák, considering that half of the country, half of Bosnia and Herzegovina does not understand you, have you thought about resigning?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

If anyone can prove that I am the problem in this country, then I would be more than willing to do so. However, when I am being accused of taking and being in a position that I am not in, and have no intention or wish of being, well then I am only motivated to further continue working in the best interest of this country.

Journalist #11:

I have a question in respect to the Security Council. Do you expect Russia to veto the prolongation of the mandate of EUFOR?

High Representative / EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák:

No.