

Interview with Igor Luksic, Candidate for UN Secretary General: “Young people must be integrated into decision-making processes”

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19/07/2016

*The United Nations will select a new Secretary General this year to take over from Ban Ki-moon, whose term ends on 31 December. In the leadup to the appointment, we will be featuring interviews with some of the candidates for the role. In the first of these discussions, EUROPP editor Tena Prelec speaks to **Igor Luksic**, the candidate from Montenegro, on his plans for the UN and what his experience in domestic politics would allow him to bring to the position.*



What is your vision for the UN's future?

In several respects, today is the best time in history that someone could have been born. Research confirms this: it is enough to look at the enormous leaps forward in medical treatments and in IT development. But the question must be asked whether most people, especially among the youth worldwide, truly feel this way. Are the young really given enough opportunities? Arguably, this is not the case. My approach is therefore about bridging current difficulties by highlighting the opportunities that are available. I believe that the keyword must be optimism – we need to bring optimism back to the world.

It is undeniable that the world is increasingly riddled by a number of pressing challenges, of which the refugee crisis is but one emanation. But we should not underestimate the opportunities we have to make a change. The question we need to ask is whether we are able to implement such a change. I believe we are, but only if we satisfy two conditions.

First, countries cannot work in isolation. We need to give back to the UN a holistic vision. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, but rather make use of what we have now as efficiently as possible to achieve maximum unity. Second, radical and enduring change can only come gradually. This is why I am convinced that it is absolutely crucial for the UN to put its focus on development, as we have seen with the current Secretary General and his team in working out the Sustainable Development agenda or the Addis Ababa action agenda or the Climate Accord, for instance. Now it is up to us to implement these pledges.

You have a rich background and have held important positions in the past, including the title of the world's youngest Prime Minister. How do you think your various experiences have formed you and made you a suitable candidate for the United Nations?

They are all certainly helpful: a UN Secretary General must have a very wide perspective and be able to effectively oversee a large number of operations. Budgetary concerns are very pressing today, and I feel that my experience as a Finance Minister overseeing a difficult task – delivering an ambitious modernisation agenda in post-independence Montenegro, and achieving remarkable economic growth – has equipped me well for this challenge.

My background in the Balkans is, in a way, also an advantage. The Western Balkans is a region which has been through a great deal of upheaval within the last twenty years. In the meantime, we have undergone a long process of integration. My own country, Montenegro, has achieved a relatively peaceful independence and is a tolerant place, of which I am very proud. The fact that I have experienced turmoil at first hand allows me to recognise and tackle it in the future.

By pursuing EU and especially NATO integration, your country has made itself unpopular with Russia – a

former ally of yours. Considering that Russia sits on the UN Security Council, how will this affect your election prospects?

It is true that our relations with Russia have somewhat deteriorated lately. This has been something that our government could not avoid: [from day one we have set our priorities as being European integration and NATO accession](#), and we have been faithful to this resolution. We therefore aligned our actions with EU decisions even in cases when they were not fully in line with our domestic interests (such as in the case of the sanctions against Russia following the Ukraine crisis, given our long historical relationship and economic cooperation).

There is however no trace of bad blood at a personal level in my view. Ultimately, I can say that I have always acted in accordance with my principles, and I think that this is the aspect that UN countries will look at when selecting the next Secretary General. Additionally, there are so many things that point to the need of increased cooperation between the EU and Russia and therefore I hope the rift will heal soon based on mutual understanding and a common agenda.



Igor Luksic at the LSE, June 2016. Credits: LSE

There has also been a lot of talk about the need for a female Secretary General.

About this, alas, I cannot do much! I however believe that a man can also play a big role in promoting gender equality. If I am elected, I am committed to integrating a woman in my team, for instance as a Deputy Secretary General and on other positions within the Senior Management Team. It is also important to ensure geographic balance. If the Secretary General will end up being a candidate from the northern hemisphere, then the deputy should ideally come from the southern hemisphere.

You have said that you would like to improve the level of representation in the Security Council. How exactly would you like to do that?

The procedure for reforming the Security Council is long and cumbersome and honestly there is not much room for the Secretary General in this process. There have only ever been a few amendments to the UN charter. But I believe that we need fresh thinking and that the Security Council should reflect a changing world.

I cannot indicate a specific way forward, as it is ultimately up to the UN member states to decide which changes they want to implement, and there are already several proposals on the table, but it will be vital for the next Secretary General to act as a broker for this process if asked, and I am certainly very motivated to take an active role in it. As in the case of the UN Secretary General selection procedure, which has been reformed and made more transparent upon the call of the member states, changes are possible to implement. I will certainly be focused on modifying the way the UN operates to help decision making in the Security Council.

You were actively involved in the ‘Western Balkans 6’ initiative and stated that it could be a successful model of collaboration for the future. Where and how would you see this recreated?

Potentially, everywhere: regional cooperation is extremely important. It is a powerful tool of preventive diplomacy. The UN cannot and, I am convinced, should not do everything. I am a big supporter of a strategy in which the UN works as much as possible as an umbrella for sub-initiatives: if we do not engage enough with local projects, it is

possible that in some areas regional initiatives will take precedence over the UN.

You have repeatedly emphasised your commitment to resolving issues affecting young people. What are the concrete actions you would be planning to carry out in this area?

Indeed, I believe the focus on youth to be crucial as almost half of today's world population is under 25 years old, but in many places the opportunities for the young are still curtailed. If our aim is to build a better present and an even brighter future, it is essential that young people are integrated into decision-making processes and given enough chances to widen their worldview and to develop their skills, and I believe that new technologies have a big role to play in this respect. That is why, among other ways to engage with the young, I would like to set up an office for youth within the UN, similarly to the initiatives already in place which are centred on gender equality (UN Women).

Finally, do you think that there is a role for the UN to bring North Korea in from the cold?

I do: It is essential to learn from recent good examples and also from past mistakes. The Iran dialogue has been a successful enterprise and we need to keep going in that direction. Similarly, the effort in North Korea requires a truly international synergy.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Igor Lukšić gave a talk at the LSE in June 2016, organised by the LSE's Financial Markets Group Research Centre and by the Institute of Global Affairs (IGA). You can listen to the podcast of his talk [here](#).

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About the interviewee

Igor Lukšić

Igor Lukšić is the Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Montenegro. He was previously the country's Prime Minister (from 2010 until 2012).



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