

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative: “It Is Disgraceful and Scandalous to Think Only of Oneself”

Ashdown's message to Bosnian parliamentarians

The parliamentarians hope that they will have pensions ten times higher than the Federation average and that they can retire after only 20 years of service. That is a disgrace

Disgraceful and scandalous – that is what High Representative Paddy Ashdown said of the initiative of BiH parliamentarians aimed at enacting a law regulating their rights and responsibilities, which would legalise their numerous and shameless privileges.

“Every person in BiH would be appalled and furious if that law was to be enacted in the Parliament. That idea came soon after their recent pay rise. And now they are hoping that, if the law on their rights and responsibilities is enacted, their pensions will be ten times higher than the Federation average and that they can retire after only 20 years of service. That is a disgrace. Parliamentarians should be considering how to improve the lives of their citizens instead of working for themselves only,” Ashdown told *Oslobođenje* on Thursday.

Expressing a dilemma about whether it is necessary for him to act with regard to the parliamentarians' initiative – since, he stressed, it is not his job to interfere with legislative projects, nor to “prevent people from doing some stupid things” – Ashdown recalled the following: “Parliamentarians cannot find enough money for schools, doctors, pensions, and yet they would take so much for themselves. It would be

appalling to make such a decision", he said, and mentioned the good example of Šefik Džaferović, who, he says, is the only one who has shown some sense and refused to receive the pay rise.

That, Ashdown believes, should be the overwhelming reaction.

"Any other reaction would place in question peoples' trust in politicians, which is rather low anyway. Government costs have already gone beyond the capacities of this country, ordinary citizens do not have decent salaries or jobs, they cannot pay for the school system and health system, since so much is paid to parliament members and the bureaucracy. I believe that the enactment of such a law would be scandalous," Ashdown said, and urged the parliamentarians to reconsider the enactment of this law again.

This is not, he added, just about more privileges, but also represents a breach of standards which parliamentarians must comply with.

Chance or tragedy?

"It would be a tragedy for this country if we did not use the great opportunities in this year. There are four main issues – the organisation of Mostar, SIPA, establishment of the intelligence service and single judicial commission at the state level. If we do not succeed by February, or if we fail to make any progress, that will be a huge catastrophe," Ashdown says.

Ashdown recalled that by the end of February the authorities will have to address some major tasks – appointment of the defence minister, deputy minister and chief commander of the army.