

High Representative Calls for BiH Debate on the Cost of Government

The High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, on Monday called on the people of BiH to ask fundamental questions about how much their governments and public administration cost – and how much they actually deliver.

The High Representative said tough decisions would have to be made if the present effort to reform BiH's cumbersome and expensive public administration is to succeed. "If we keep on doing what we are doing, we will keep on getting what we've got. And what we've got at the moment is an outdated, overstaffed, unresponsive and inefficient administration that can't pay its workers, and can't serve its citizens," he told participants at a UNDP conference on civil service reform.

The real scandal of government in BiH is that doctors, teachers and others are desperately trying to do their job, but aren't getting paid; while many politicians, perhaps most conspicuously in Canton Seven, are getting paid but aren't doing their job, the High Representative said. He added that "the full consequences of its poorly managed civil service" have not yet been felt in BiH because of the "comfortable cushion" of international aid. He said steps taken to initiate a comprehensive review of the performance of bureaucrats will root out incompetence and corruption without in any way penalising honest and competent public officials.

"If we in the International Community are serious about handing over full governance of this country to its elected officials – and we are – the status quo is not an option," the High Representative said. He said the impetus to provide BiH with the kind of modern, efficient and honest civil service

that is a prerequisite of market democracy, must be driven not by politicians or international officials – but by the citizens of BiH themselves.

“No country can be successful if it pays so much to its politicians and bureaucrats, and then cannot pay its teachers, and keeps its pensioners in penury, and gives its citizens Third World health facilities, and has not a penny left to invest in jobs,” the High Representative said.

He said the case for fundamental and far-reaching reform was overwhelming, noting that:

- BiH spends **64%** of its GDP on its politicians and its bureaucrats, compared to 43% in Slovenia or 31% in Albania;
- BiH spends proportionally **twice as much on defence** as the UK, France or even its neighbours in the Balkans;
- BiH is the only country in the Balkans without a kilometer of motorway, and at the current rate it would take **100 years** to build its 500 km share of the Ploce-Budapest highway;
- the Federation spends only 0.3% of its budget on education;
- **92,000 of BiH's young people** have left the country since 1991, and **70% of its university staff** have done the same.

The High Representative emphasised that he was not coming forward with solutions but starting a debate. Simplifying the government, perhaps even making constitutional changes, will be a matter for the people to decide.