

Excerpt from the High Representative's interview with FENA News Agency marking the 2nd Anniversary of Paddy Ashdown's mandate as High Representative

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Speaking of the results achieved during the past two years, since taking on the mandate of High Representative, Ashdown said that the foundations had been laid for the establishment of a state according to the European model, one which was on the road to membership of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

– BiH has now opened the door leading from the Dayton era to the Brussels era, but we must realize the opportunities we have to get closer to the European family during the coming year, the High Representative said.

He explained that, if BiH joined the Stabilization and Association Process and the Partnership for Peace this year, it's road to statehood in Europe would be irreversible in many of the most important aspects.

Speaking about key successes during his mandate, the High Representative gave first place to the reform of the judiciary. The Court of BiH became operational on time, in January 2003, and has since carried out 202 investigations, issued 39 indictments against 164 persons and passed 46 verdicts. Among them are individuals who were amongst the most

powerful in the country and the Court has thus proved that when even the highest ranking cannot hide if they are guilty of crime and corruption.

The High Representative stated that the judiciary was constantly improving at lower levels, too, and said he was convinced that judicial reform would result justice for the whole of BiH during the next several next years.

Another key thing, in his opinion, is the establishment of the Indirect Taxation Authority. The state must, as he said, have an appropriate tax system on its whole territory and work on that has begun. This means that there will be an appropriate funding system for the state but also the open door to massive corruption will close.

A third success, in the High Representative's judgement, are the amendments adopted by the BiH authorities establishing armed forces at the state level.

– These three steps show that BiH is now leaving the Dayton era and entering the Brussels era. In the next year, you will see this trend continue and accelerate, Ashdown said.

He added that Europe would formally take the lead role with EUFOR's takeover of the SFOR's mission, when his role as EU Special Representative would become more important and that of the High Representative less important.

– I will retain the double mandate, but it is very probable that I will be more EU Special Representative than High Representative in the next year, before the third anniversary of my mandate here, Ashdown pointed out, adding that this would depend on how fast BiH authorities worked on reforms.

Furthermore he said that the relationship between the International Community and the BiH authorities would begin to change as BiH firmly and steadily enters mainstream European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Ashdown emphasized the importance of implementing economic reforms, saying they needed time and that he understood people's impatience when they expected jobs. You cannot reform economy and have jobs and investment instantly, he said.

He warned that unless we implemented reforms now, including privatisation, market liberalization, and in particular of the labour market, and bankruptcy laws, and remove the unnecessary regulations which impede the generation of new jobs – reforms set out within the Bulldozer process – we would not have jobs in the future.