

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative in BiH, announces: "Amnesty for 90 dismissed persons"

BANJA LUKA – High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, will allow today a majority of dismissed officials, except for the highest ranking persons such as ministers and their assistants and those who were discharged from their offices due to obstruction of cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, to return to public service.

«The Decision, with certain limitations, is related to roughly 90 officials», stated Paddy Ashdown for «Nezavisne novine and added that all officials affected by this Decision would be able to apply for jobs in the civil service.

All officials dismissed by Decisions of the High Representative were so far banned from working in the public sector. Such powers were given to the High Representative in 2001, and Ashdown and Wolfgang Petritsch, his predecessor, have made use of them during their respective mandates.

Ashdown, who is going to leave his office at the end of this year, outlined that he decided on this Decision in the light of the decision of the European Union to initiate negotiations with BiH that, among other things, means transferring responsibilities to domestic authorities.

«This is the first step in that track and if the Decision is implemented in an accountable manner my successor will be able to broaden the list», Ashdown said. «But, at the same time, if the Decision is abused he may suspend the process.»

The Decision, he added, pertains to a number of officials dismissed during his and Petritsch's mandate.

However, the Decision incorporates several restrictions. Officials who were dismissed due to obstruction of cooperation with the ICTY, among others, nonetheless cannot apply for jobs in public service. Their return to public service will be permitted after Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, the two most wanted ICTY indictees, have been arrested.

"Furthermore, the Decision does not pertain to jobs in the security sector- the police, the armed force and the Security and Intelligence Agency. Moreover, the highest ranking officials, such as Ministers and their assistants, may not apply for public service," Ashdown stated.

Pursuant to his Decision, which will be publicised today, all pardoned officials may not automatically return to the respective offices they were dismissed from. They will be eligible to apply only for positions that are publicly advertised, and all who apply for such public positions must inform their prospective employer that the High Representative dismissed them.

This is the second time in a short period that Ashdown has granted amnesty to dismissed officials. In early November he restored to public and political life 23 officials, mostly SDS members.