

Interview: Paddy Ashdown, High Representative to BiH: “What will the High Representative be doing after the end of the mandate”

Ashdown: It would be a great honour for me to lobby for BiH

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Following October next year, OHR could stop working * I will
fight for the visa regime to be abolished*

In a few weeks' time the International Community might decide on who will be the new (and the last) High Representative.

Paddy Ashdown should leave our country by February next year and go back to London . His home there is now already being renovated. Although when replying to what he will be doing after the end of his mandate as the High Representative he immediately says that he will be taking a break enjoying gardening, he admits that he has other plans too.

The road to statehood

Ashdown says that in his inaugural speech at the end of May 2002 he emphasized three priorities.

– I said then that I wished to put BiH irreversibly on the road to statehood. We have set the foundations of a modern, decentralized state – the BiH intelligence service is under the control of the parliament, we have a single taxation

system, one army under the control of the state, one customs service, SIPA, we are on the way to getting a single police structure, a single economic space... All these things are some of the results of a three-and-a-half-year-long effort – Ashdown says. However, he emphasizes that there is a lot more to be done in order for the established institutions to become functional and that will be the priority of his successor.

-When we now start the stabilization and association process with the EU, we have irreversibly stepped on the road to Europe. So far, no one has started that trip without becoming a member of the European Union in the end – Ashdown said.

The end of the Office

He emphasizes that his goal has also been for BiH to get as close as possible to the moment when it will no longer need the OHR. He believes that already following October next year the OHR could cease operating, and could be replaced by the Office of the EU Special Representative. However, he admits that he has become very emotionally attached to BiH.

-This is a beautiful country with extraordinary people. I'd wish, if I may, to lobby for BiH. That would be a great honour for me. I wish to persuade Europe to hurry up and include the Western Balkans in its family so that this happens as soon as possible. If I'm in a position to do so, I'll try for this process to last as briefly as possible. I wish to lobby for the abolition of a visa regime. I won't be sitting idle, I'll promote BiH wherever I can – Ashdown says.

Three candidates

– The international community is considering who is going to be my successor. The decision regarding this should be issued

within four to six weeks. Media have already presented the candidates so far – a Czech, an Italian lady, and as far as I know, the Netherlands has its candidate as well. So far Germany has not offered its candidate for the High Representative – Ashdown said.