

BIO-DIPLOMACY – THE HUNGARIAN EXPERIENCE

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On thinking back over my thirty years of activity in the diplomatic service and comparing some twenty-five years ago with today, it occurred to me that environmental issues simply were not on the agenda in the past. In my field of course, certain international organisations dealt with those issues at that time, but certainly it was not a part of everyday diplomatic activity, as it is today.

Diplomatic activity is basically carried out on three levels: the global level, the regional level and the bilateral level. There have been enormous developments in the last ten years in this respect and although the problems ahead of us are great, I am very hopeful that with a combined effort, we can solve most of these problems.

There can be no doubt that economic development is strongly linked with environmental protection, and the real issue is how to harmonise business interests with the requirements of environmental protection in the context of globalisation.

First of all, what is very important is strategic thinking for the long-term in order to minimise future risks. There are problems which should be solved, not for the next ten or fifteen years, but for the next fifty or eventually one hundred years or more. The second point is regular dialogue between the interested parties – environmental organisations and business. With regular dialogue it would be possible to achieve greater success. The third point, which is a common feature of diplomacy, is prevention rather than conflict management. Therefore, success can be measured in the long term by the ways in which we try to prevent certain conflicts. If we have good examples in this area, it helps to popularise those good examples all over the world. And finally, it should be mentioned that we probably have to do more to involve politicians and decision-makers in this whole process, because that is one of the real ways in which we can have a greater influence on events.

Hungary is a relatively small central European country. Once again, fifteen years ago, there was basically no mention made of the plight of the environment. The reason is there was no public awareness. We should not forget the impact of socialist industrialisation. Civil movements were discouraged and if they appeared, they were immediately politicised. Now, the situation has changed positively and we think that Hungary could accommodate recent international tendencies. Civil society has been strengthened. We have been very successful in the last ten years in restructuring Hungarian academies and the Hungarian economy. In the last ten years, Hungary has received US\$ 22 billion in foreign investments. And what is very important, is that from the outset, when there was investment in a privatised company, the environmental position was among the first five criteria which the shareholder had to satisfy. In addition, we recently managed to close a satisfactory chapter with the European Union concerning the environment which shows that many things have happened in Hungary and we are headed in the right direction. The environmental problems we are now facing mainly concern water and air pollution, wastewater management and the sewerage system.

In addition, Hungary will continue to be active in different international organisations in the future as well. On that note, I should mention the Kyoto Protocol. It is extremely important that all countries co-operate with each other in this respect, especially highly industrialised countries.

Hungary is a country in central Europe with seven neighbours. Just to give one example, 95% of the water supply of the country comes from neighbouring countries. Therefore, we have many environmental issues on the table but we have very good relations with all of our neighbours in this respect. We have learned a lot about what we can do in the future, and we have realised that most of our problems can be solved through regional co-operation. In this respect, for example, there is already an agreement with Romania, Ukraine and Hungary. We feel that it is of vital importance to adopt a moratorium system, the legal harmonisation of those issues, and we will be ready to sign other specific agreements.

An economist and diplomat by profession, **Ambassador Istvan Pataki** graduated from Karl Marx University of Economics in 1972 and joined the Hungarian Foreign Ministry in the same year. He has served on the International Commission of Control and Supervision in Vietnam, as Press and Cultural Attache in Poland, Deputy Chief of Mission in the USA, and Deputy State Secretary for EU and NATO member countries. In 1991, he was appointed First Resident Ambassador to Ireland. Since 1998, he has been Hungarian Ambassador to Greece.