

## **STRENGTHENING THE LIFE SUPPORTING SYSTEM OF OUR PLANET AND THE ROLE OF THE B.I.O.**

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The United Nations lists 214 shared rivers. 148 flowing through two countries, 31 through three countries and the remaining 62 flowing through four or more countries. Close to 300 international treaties have been signed between countries on transboundary water flows. The Danube has the largest number of riparian States. It is the world's "most international" river. Relations between the riparian States of the Danube basin comprise a very important aspect of their political, economic and environmental problems.

The turn of the century is an era of remarkable changes in our region, the era of rapid and often bewildering alterations of the conditions and forces, shaping human life. This is evident both in the new geopolitics of the post-Cold-War period and in the growing understanding of relationships between human beings and the natural world. It is also the era of the reintegration of the countries of this region into the global economy. In a broader sense, every country in the world is a part of the global economy. The concept of integration, and reintegration is used here as a process of re-entering in the global markets, through different ways and channels of co-operation, under new political and economic conditions.

For any given country, there are different standards of participation in the global system, including the historical development of the economy, which is shaping the place of that country in the global division of labour. There are also geographical, economic, political, institutional, and cultural standards in the reintegration process. Each one of these is interrelated and influenced by a number of internal and external factors, including location, size, natural endowments, human resources, development levels, economic structure, political and institutional patterns, and competitiveness.

Some of the most important external factors are: the global, or regional, regulatory framework, influencing the relationships between the participants in the act of exchange; the rules of the international trade regime; the patterns of competition in the main markets; the role and interests of the transnational corporations, to integrate the given country in their global production and marketing system; and, the degree and character of the fusion or interconnected-ness of the markets for goods, capital, services and labour. These factors are not constant, and their variations/fluctuations reflect, on the one hand, the character and diversity of the market system - which is constantly changing - and, on the other, the varying place and role of the countries in the global markets, as price takers or price makers. The impact of the external political and economic environment may be both favourable and hostile for the countries involved. There are different areas and dimensions of the reintegration process. The ones related to the improvement of the life sustaining capacity of one particular region also contribute to the environmental sustainability of global economic development. The global ecosystem is the medium in which human development takes place; sustained within its narrow bio-geo-chemical parameters, it is wide-spread, complex, and diverse. Contributing to the global protection and restoration of natural resources, is an important duty for all the Danube countries.

Most of the Danube States have experienced a number of extremely serious environmental problems, caused by negligence, poor industrialisation policies, urbanisation, massive and unwise use of chemicals in agriculture, and, often, by the lack of experience and know-how. Some of these problems include: (a) a noticeably accelerated degradation of ecosystems, soil, air, water resources, and forests; (b) nuclear accidents, particularly in the former Soviet Union, that signalled increasing dangers for all the countries, using nuclear power; (c) difficulties in environmental management, caused by conflicts of interest between the main polluters and the rest of the population.

However, there have also been certain positive developments, in almost all of the countries. Knowledge about environmental problems and their dangers has spread rapidly among scholars and a new multidisciplinary area has emerged; environmental studies. This field involves a great number of scholars, from disciplines ranging from physics to psychology, and deals with the interactions between complex environmental systems, national and international policies, and the behaviours of human beings and their effects on the ecosystem. The spread of knowledge about environmental problems has raised public awareness and has mobilised millions of people at the grassroots level, in many countries. The environmental movements have been important assets for the necessary changes in systems and attitudes to occur.

### **Danube countries and the global ecosystem**

In the new era, when the Danube countries have become increasingly integrated into global processes and institutions, the international aspects of environmental policies, and their potential regional harmonisation, will also become more important. The countries of the Danube region are also participating, in a new way, in the development and implementation of international environmental policies. International environmental policies must respond to the great array of specific problems, regarding the future of the global ecosystem. Environmental policies cannot be

dealt with in isolation from global socio-economic and techno-economic development.

There are, however, three very important elements that have to be taken into account, in the formulation of a global ecosystem policy. These are: the management of the global commons, beyond national territorial jurisdictions; the emission and transboundary transmission of environmental pollution, the control over which would require new forms of international co-operation; and, the broad, regional and global implications of national policies that result in environmental problems or catastrophes, such as major losses in biodiversity - a minimum of 140 plant and animal species are condemned to extinction each day - desertification, deforestation - forests are vanishing at a rate of about 17 million hectares per year - pollution of oceans and international waterways, and other such losses. International co-operation, for rehabilitating the damaged environment and for the management of globally sustainable development, is considered vital in this context.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the basically positive approach to environmental issues by governments and the fact that a broad coalition of non-governmental agents supports common international action, real progress towards a globally, or even regionally implemented, environmental policy is still very slow. This is obviously due to the existence of different and, sometimes diverging, interests, concerning priorities and specific measures for undertaking joint environmental policies. The divergence in priorities predominantly occurs between North and South. As the developed industrial countries generate about 80% of total global pollution, developing countries often remark that they are not willing to sacrifice their development - thus mitigating some environmental damage - in order to manage the problems caused by the industrialised world. Some of the more radical experts or political figures of the South even accuse the North of environmental imperialism and insist that environmental issues cannot be dealt with in isolation from general global socio-economic inequalities. There are, however, important differences between developing countries in resource management, natural resource pricing, and the commercial utilisation of resources such as forests. In order to promote industrial development, some developing countries subsidise energy prices and are less focused on inefficient energy use.

The North is also quite heterogeneous in its willingness to assume responsibility or costs for environmental safeguards in such areas, for example, as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or CFC problems. The chain of events leading to the Montreal Protocol, on issues pertaining to CFC use, is an important case study of how micro and macro interests, on a national level, can influence disputes and their resolution. Disputes concerning CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and other causes of global warming are more complicated. For example, there are strong and divergent interests connected with the traditional sources of energy. Incomplete information, difficulties in monitoring compliance, and the reluctance to commit to unilateral measures and costs - because such costs would increase production costs and/or divert funds from other investments - are some of the stumbling blocks to achieving co-operation and implementing common policies.

For the developed industrial countries, the costs of environmental measures and their influence on competitiveness has also been an important source of disagreement. Divergence in interest is further aggravated by the fact that the great variety of national economic models makes even the very enacting of multilateral measures difficult, including even those that have been agreed upon through various prior international agreements.<sup>2</sup> The implementation of the different agreements for the protection of the environment, signed, for example, within the framework of the Economic Commission for Europe, were only partially implemented by the Danube countries. Opportunities provided within the framework of the Danube Commission were not used efficiently, either.

More convergence is needed in environmental policies, and there are important common tasks to be fulfilled. First of all, national competence in dealing with environmental problems must be improved. This is a particularly important task for the Danube Basin, where environmental interdependence is much greater, than in other European regions, due to the connecting role of the Danube and its impact on water supply, including ground water, and to the direction of the winds, which influences atmospheric pollution.

### **Participating in global environmental governance**

Important lessons can be drawn from the history of the development of environmental management, in a number of industrialised countries. An analysis of the environmental policies of the major industrialised countries reveals a three-stage development process, which largely follows similar patterns in each country.<sup>3</sup>

First, there is a phase of environmental inaction or negligence - preceded by environmental ignorance - in which the bureaucracy remains basically passive, in spite of the proven damages to public health and nature. Relevant information is ignored and social protest disregarded, or even oppressed. The second stage is a period of symbolic activity, where environmental strategies are formulated and programs and bills issued, although their implementation is, at best, marginal. The third stage is the beginning of active technocratic environmental management with piecemeal and selective, but increasingly efficient, measures. Piecemeal management is defined as the measures which, although implemented, ignore the interdependence of an ecosystem's component parts.

The transition from one stage to the next requires not only greater education among policy makers, heightened research, and improved interaction among experts, parliamentarians and government officials, but also changes in public priorities and attitudes, and amendments in the level and efficiency of international co-operation. The countries of the Danube region are currently in different phases, in reference to the above classification scheme, and the global community, as a whole, is still very much located in the second phase. The reintegration of the former socialist countries into the global economy and, also, into the global environmental system, implies new forms of and models for global environmental management.

At the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the governments of the world took a historically important step for global environmental governance when they adopted both Agenda 21, which is a global, comprehensive program for action on sustainable development, and the Rio declaration, which defined the rights and responsibilities of States. As in the case of any multilateral action, it was necessary to have a certain country assume a leadership position in advocating the cause of environmental protection, but not too many countries were interested in this role. International financing was also needed by the countries without adequate funds to implement environmental policies. The total annual funding requirements, for achieving the goals set at the Rio Earth Summit, has been estimated at about US\$125 billion. Only a small fraction of this was supposed to be available from external sources. Most of those funds had to be raised and spent within national frameworks.

The "follow up" of the Rio Summit may provide some information on how far the above funding targets have been met, on a global level. Certain important technical assistance requirements could be met within a bilateral or multilateral framework. The mechanism required for overseeing institutional environmental work, aided perhaps by sanctions against those nations that ignore international agreements, was partially established at the Rio conference. Also, the setting up of a Global Commission on Sustainable Development was an important step towards the establishment of the necessary global structure, but, unfortunately, this was done without sufficient power and resources.

The post Rio years proved the difficulties of a globally harmonised environmental governance. Poverty, the lack of domestic resources and the insufficient international commitments, for supporting countries without appropriate national capabilities and resources, constituted important constraints in the South. The growing affluence was not necessarily resulting in major improvements in the North. There are strong alliances and closed policy networks in energy, transport, agro-business and other areas, in every country, and these alliances have the power to ignore environmental imperatives. Moreover, most economic and market instruments were not sufficiently strong in the implementation of policies. The establishment of national commissions on sustainable development in more than 100 countries was in many cases a formal step, without major influence on environmental policies. The harmonisation of international actions and the co-ordination of the work of the different intergovernmental organisations in the area of environmental protection proved to be more difficult than expected. Still, Rio represented an important turning point in global environmental governance, the results of which will probably materialise in the early parts of the next century.

Rio also opened up new ways and means for co-operation among volunteer associations and NGOs. In this situation, international organisations like the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) have a very important role to play in developing knowledge, making information easily accessible and creating partnerships for the strengthening of the life support system on our planet. Global environmental threats are interactive phenomena. As a result, the B.I.O. will have to work in a complex, interactive way, taking into account regional and natural variability and diversity, human induced stresses, the sensitivity and resilience of the ecosystem, and the goals and capacities of management systems. In the case of the countries of the Danube Basin, both the regional constraints and the dynamics of change, as well as the trajectories of environmental changes, must be taken into account for their future development.

## References

1. "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and does not imply in any way encroachment upon national sovereignty... It implies, further, the existence of a supportive international economic environment that would result in sustained economic growth and development in all countries, particularly in the developing countries, which is of major importance for sound management of the environment. It also implies the maintenance, rational use and enhancement of the natural resource base that underpins ecological resilience and economic growth. Sustainable development further implies incorporation of environmental concerns and consideration in development planning and policies..." (Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-Fourth Session, Supplement no. 25; A/44/25, Decision 15/2, Annex II.)
2. By the end of 1991, there were no less than 16 important international intergovernmental organisations and more than 1,300 international NGOs dealing with the ecosystem management and co-operation on environmental issues. The U.N. General Assembly adopted 5 main detailed resolutions, and there were 10 other important resolutions initiating specific programs adopted by the different U.N. bodies, the OECD, the EC, and other regional organisations with multilateral frameworks. 10 major multilateral intergovernmental declarations, 164 multilateral conventions, agreements, and protocols, and dozens of bilateral agreements currently cover a variety of areas for environmental co-operation and joint action.
3. Helmut Wiedner, "The Capability of the Capitalist State to 'Solve' Environmental Problems," paper presented at the XV World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Buenos Aires, 1991.

Economics, and Director of the Graduate Program on International Business Strategy. Professor Simai's professional experience includes teaching, research, business consulting and research management. From 1986 to 1992, he was Member and Chairman of the Council of the United Nations University, and from 1993 to 1995, Director of the World Institute for Development Economics of the United Nations University in Helsinki. He is on the Editorial Board of a number of international journals, including *Transnational* (Geneva), *Global Governance* (New York), *International Affairs* (London), *Development Studies* (Geneva), and *Environment and Resource Economics* (Amsterdam), and has published more than 240 scientific articles and 36 books in Hungarian, English, French, Russian, Arabic, Korean and Japanese. Professor Simai is Honorary President and former President of the World Federation of United Nations Associations, President of the Hungarian United Nations Association and President of the Hungarian National Committee for UNICEF.