

BIO-DIPLOMACY – SPEEDING UP THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVOLUTION

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Slovakia is one of the countries involved in the convention concerning the protection of world and national cultural heritage. In Slovakia, there is a cross-border national park with Hungary and two national parks with Poland, which are now protected areas.

Greece has organised a joint initiative for the first cross-border protected area in the Balkans, and an agreement has been signed between Greece, FYROM and Albania. The agreement covers a range of issues, including water resource management, environmental protection, tourism policy and joint management of household and agricultural waste. The Agreement was originally initiated by the World Wildlife Fund and the Prespa Protection Society, and shows how important it is for governments and international and local NGOs to co-operate.

Today, it is more urgent than any time in the past, to find ways for co-operation among politicians, scientists, economists and local leaders. Naturally, there are intergovernmental agreements and other instruments of co-operation, but the activities of NGOs have the ability to speed up the whole process.

Not all actions are success stories: they are sometimes based on lack of information. The world is at the beginning of a new millennium and faces potentially convulsive change. The question is, what direction will this take. Will the change come from initiatives that preserve our planet from degradation, or from continuing environmental degradation that leads to economic decline and social instability?

We need more national parks, but their organisation has to be projected in an environmentally sound way. We must leave space in our neighbourhoods for the flora and fauna. In the developed part of the world, we have to watch our consumption patterns. It is not enough to pinpoint all the problems associated with the diminishing rainforest and other crucial environmental issues in developing areas, without looking at the situation around us first.

I once expressed my concern about the world's diminishing rainforests to a friend from Papua New Guinea, and he replied with a single sentence: "You know, we want to put an ice-cube in our drink as well!" This sentence comes to mind over and over again when I see how European forests are diminishing, and how our rivers and seas are strongly affected by pollution. It was, and is, easy to tell others what to do.

To reduce the degradation of the environment, we have to regulate our consumption patterns. Of course, this does not mean a complete return of humankind to the past. People started to develop agriculture 10,000 years ago; industry 200 years ago. Humankind has discovered a powerful instrument for the development of human society – industrialisation. Efforts should be focused on finding ways to speed up the environmental revolution. This revolution should be compressed into a few decades. For instance, scientists deem that the period up to mid-February 2000 is very critical for the ozone layer over the northern hemisphere. There has been a lot done to reverse this trend. Now some scientists estimate that the first signs of the recuperation of the ozone layer can be anticipated within five years.

The absolute loss of biological diversity is undermining sustainable development opportunities forever. We should focus on further development and the application of integrated approaches for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. One of the possible ways to reach this goal is through co-operation. Slovakia, as an associated country with the European Union, has very intensive co-operation with the EU in the field of environmental protection. The highest priority of Slovak foreign policy is to join the EU, where we belong historically, politically and culturally.

Slovakia wishes to reach all EU standards, and environmental standards are no exception to this. Slovakia is pleased to know that the European Commission has qualified the decision of the Slovakian government concerning the timetable for the closure of two nuclear power plants as "forward-looking and adopted in the spirit of European integration." Slovakia takes its commitments as an EU candidate and future member seriously. The government and other crucial actors of public life team up in order to gradually comply with all the criteria that are the basis for accession of a candidate country to the EU.

I would like to thank the B.I.O. President, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, for bringing us all together in her mission to find solutions for protecting the world we live in.

Ambassador Milan Dubcek holds degrees from the University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia, and from the Institute for International Studies, University of Leeds, UK. From 1972 to 1998, he assumed posts at the Ministry of Forestry and Water Management of Slovakia, at the Slovak Statistical Office in Bratislava, at the Department of International Co-operation of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, Czechoslovakia, at the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the United Nations in New York, at the UNDP as Vice President of the Executive Board, and at the Department of International Organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia. In 1998, he was Director of the Department of International Economic Co-operation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before being appointed to his current position as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Greece.

