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**Everything Will Be  
Different**

# Introduction

*“Today our task is to find balance  
between individual and collective responsibility.”*

*(Anthony Giddens)*

Let us go ahead in time. Not much, only six years. It is 2010 and the parliamentary elections are being held. But it is not only the elections that make this year significant, as, luckily, the democratic contest that takes place every four years is like an everyday routine now, and the citizens will have cast their votes once more before this year comes. However, even from this aspect everything will be different in 2010.

The generation born after the change of political regime will vote for the first time this year. The first generation that will not even have kindergarten memories of the old world; those eighteen/twenty-year-old youngsters who reach the threshold of adulthood after completing their studies in the schools of the democratic state.

These youngsters will see the then young people that played a dominant role in changing the political regime as mature, successful middle-aged politicians, fossils to be overthrown. For these youngsters the then politically active middle-aged generation will only be a crowd of grandfathers and grandmothers, while those who were in their sixties in 1990 will only be a memory of history, or a mere footnote, or even a completely forgotten no-name, a faceless mass. For these youngsters the well-remembered year of 1990 will be history just like the years 1956 and 1968 were for the generations before them.

The generation of those who will vote for the first time in 2010 will be different from the earlier generations even from the aspect that they will receive their salary only in Euros from the moment they start work, they will only remember Forints as their childhood pocket money, a peculiar means of payment. In 2010 everybody will receive their payments in Euros, but the older generations will change Euros to Forints in their minds automatically for a long-long time, and they will remember Forints with nostalgic feelings like many of their ancestors remembered the *Pengő* after World War II.

However, the reason why everything will be different in 2010 is not because the generation described above will enter the scene, or not only because they will be paid in Euros. All this would still not make this year a real watershed. Much more is needed for this, changes should take place that are at least as significant as the ones made in 1990, when we had to change from the single-party state regime to the democratic system from one year to the next, whilst in motion.

The changes in 2010 may not be as spectacular as the change of the political regime was, but they will still be changes of vital importance. We had better prepare for all this well ahead of time. Right now. Even if we know that it will be preceded by parliamentary elections in 2006 and European parliamentary elections in 2009. These will also be significant milestones in the life of the Hungarian nation, but it will be in 2010 that we take the really great step.

Why?

First of all, because in the year 2010 Hungary will take part in the competition under the same conditions as the European countries that are presently far more developed than us. We will transfer to the same branch of sport. Why mention sport here? Symbolically speaking in 2010 Hungary can enter the competition with other member states of the European Union under the same economic conditions and circumstances.

The past and present situations are both characterised by that while the more developed countries are “playing handball”, we are “playing table tennis”, and the two things just do not match. The rules are different, the size of the playing area is different, in the one game they throw the ball, while they hit it in the other, and so on. But in 2010 we will also be “playing handball”; that is to say in the following six years we will learn and use the rules that are valid inside the European Union.

This period of time will be long enough for us to transform ourselves, to adapt ourselves to the new circumstances, to show what we can do when we are allowed to take part in the game under more or less the same conditions.

Secondly, because by introducing the Euro we cross a significant borderline both in practice and also spiritually speaking, which is just as important. Our level of integration with the European community will be more dynamic, and, what is also important, more visible on the everyday level. Everybody will be able to judge their own circumstances by their own income, by counting the Euros they have in their pockets, and they can compare themselves to the citizens of other member states: they can see what they have achieved and what the country has achieved. I am convinced that all this will encourage and incite people rather than hold them back.

Thirdly, because before 2010 the European Union will be extended with further member states, and Romania, a country of special significance from our point of view, will also accede to the community. I find it important to mention this, because in our region the nature of the current Hungarian-Romanian system of relations is at least as decisive as French-German relations are from the aspect of Europe. The two countries will be provided with another historical opportunity to settle their relationship within the great European community. In 2010 this opportunity will present itself more favourably than in the former “socialist block”.

Last, but not least, in 2010 the system of relations in Hungarian domestic politics will also be completely different. Presently both great parliamentary parties – and even the smaller ones – are right in the middle of an epoch-making transformation. Due to the defeat the right wing suffered twice in the two elections held in 2002, it started this transformation earlier; while the left wing, that is the socialists are only starting to face reforms now, partly due to their failure in the European parliamentary elections held in 2004.

In six years, at the time of the parliamentary elections of 2010, both political sides will be able to fight for their own victory with their own image, their own program, and no less importantly, with their own following. Up to now they have only fed on each other’s faults, on the votes of punishment of the electorate. All parliamentary elections that have taken place since the change of political regime were decided by punishment votes, that is instead of voting for something or somebody the citizens mostly voted against something or somebody.

It will be different in 2010: programs, pictures of the future, and no less importantly the representatives of the new generations of politicians that appeared after the change of political

regime will be competing against each other. Public life will be characterised by clearer debates that are no longer influenced by the immediate past before 1990.

Preparation for the parliamentary elections to be held in 2010 should be started right now. Obviously this does not mean that the elections to be held in 2006 will be less important, because naturally the aim must be victory even then. At the same time the reforming processes started at present, the movements within the Hungarian Socialist Party will represent real reformation only if they are not aimed at the short term, only if society is not addressed just in the interest of winning the next elections, but if we look much further ahead.

There is a lot to do, first of all regarding determining the schedule and the main directions. The efforts of the left wing, the forces of progression, to be renewed can be experienced on a worldwide scale. The problems cannot be said to be new. The international left wing has been following new paths for a long time: both in theory and practice. It is advisable for the forces of Hungarian progression to take into consideration all the debates occurring in and experience gained from academic workshops and in the practical work of the leading European social-democratic parties.

For example, at the meetings of the international Policy Network think tank operating attached to the British Labour Party – I was elected to its presiding body in 2004 – it is nearly regarded as a cliché that after the information and technological explosion of the present era the traditional left wing must give new answers to the burning questions concerning society; most importantly with respect to the systems of relations between the individual and the community.

The concept of the caring state elaborated by social democracy and realised in numerous countries is obviously consuming its last reserves. It is an especially subtle topic in Hungary, where during the decades of the communist regime people got used to the omnipotence of the fatherly state that “takes care of everything”, even if it meant something completely different in practice than a social-democratic welfare state. We experienced it to our own cost that it came to a deadlock, and the similar efforts of far more developed nations also failed. Taking all this into consideration the main challenge of the left wing is how it can integrate the complex system of relations between the individual and the community into a completely new situation created as a result of the operation of global capitalism.

I explained it many times in several forums that new balances and new proportions need to be determined in respect of individual responsibility and collective solidarity. It is not only society that has obligations or “accounts to settle” with respect to its citizens. Individuals bear the most important responsibility with respect to themselves. If they have done their best for their own good and despite this they still cannot create the minimally necessary living conditions for themselves and their family, only and exclusively then are they justified to expect the community’s support.

I find it important to mention the problem of individual responsibility and collective solidarity, because this train of thought is a decisive part of the society system of operation I elaborated during the last few years when appearing at various meetings of the Hungarian and international left wing and represented in my contributions.

I also need to make another statement at the beginning of my book that although I regard myself as a left-wing person, I prefer to use the expression “progressive left-wing” with

respect to the views I explain here. This wording, which may only seem a subtle stylistic difference, is not merely for the purpose of evading the repetition of words. However, it is undoubtedly true that I prefer to use the word progress as opposed to the expression left wing, which has a narrower meaning and is regarded as obsolete from many aspects.

I consider the difference in content much more decisive than the difference in wording. Supporting progress means something more, something more modern than simply claiming to be left wing. I have the same opinion of the other political definitions in use: the attribute social democratic or the fashionable expression “the third way” are not equivalent to the system of views represented by the word progress.

Of course, the left-wing, social democracy or the third way can all be progressive, but it is not necessarily always so, and here I do not only mean the deadlock character of the Stalinist communist system. Fossilised social democracy restricted to trade union interest representation activities can also impede progress.

Today, being progressive means creating brave concepts extending to greater perspectives rather than working along electoral programs relating to a limited period of time. Concepts which basically place the individual in the centre, aiming at answering questions that have been concerning people for thousands of years, questions that basically determine our earthly life. I do not mean complex philosophical questions here, but simple challenges that affect and concern everybody, such as safe and human living conditions, work, supporting the ones in need, and the possibility of living one’s life in a meaningful way.

Striking disproportionalities should be eliminated in the distribution of property and in order to do this the policy of the things that need to be done should be determined, a schedule that can be followed. It is not enough just to say that everything will be different in 2010, but the steps leading towards the changes must be taken. And no less importantly dreams should always be defined according to the current possibilities.

When after the first round of the parliamentary elections in 2002 the socialists were in a convincingly leading position, I made a statement that Hungary could not support half a million people living from agriculture. A lot of people cast stones at me then, or rather they drew in their breath saying that it was not very wise to frighten potential voters. The processes going on in the agricultural sector prove that I was right. I do not feel gratified by that, but it demonstrates my belief that we must have the courage to tell the truth. We must not blur things, because in the long run it will strike back, if we keep sweeping problems under the carpet. We must promise as much as we can accomplish. Electors do not forget anything and they nail us down to our promises.

Read this book as thoughts of a man professing progressive views, a man who is looking at the year 2010 now on the basis of the experience of the recent past and the present. I know that six years is a sufficiently long period for starting the processes as a result of which a safer, wealthier and fairer society can be created. In order to realise this first of all we must face real challenges and decide clearly where we are now. The six years until 2010 may seem long, but it is not long enough to catch up with those who are in front of us, although it is sufficiently long for us to catch up with our own possibilities.

In 2010 I would like to be called to account for everything I state in this book and I will do it if I can. At the same time I would like everybody to examine themselves now and in 2010,

whether they did their best in the interest of being able to get ahead in life both as individuals, and together as a society. We are only justified to count on the European Union's collective solidarity in 2010, if we can demonstrate our own individual responsibility.

Things can only be different in and after 2010, if we achieve the best results our possibilities and abilities allow us to. First of all we must change our approach, and the rest of the tasks are basically built upon this. My book is first of all about what we should change and how we should go about it.

# Progress and Home Country

*“Every great movement must experience three stages: ridicule, discussion, adoption.”*

*(John Stuart Mill)*

The modern left wing supports progress. I am convinced that what is colloquially defined as the new left-wing, modern social democracy or with noble simplicity just the third way should be simply defined as the progressive party. The two-hundred-year-old history of the political left wing was always characterised as trying to achieve something different, better, more modern, newer, social progress; and never for an autotelic purpose, but in the interest of making people's lives better.

For me progressive thinking means more than just a category defined as social democratic. As we all know, social democracy means the reconciliation of capital and socialist views, and the third way is a special mixture social democracy and liberalism, at least in the way realised by the New Labour Party in the United Kingdom. (The creator of the theory, Anthony Giddens, in his book “The Third Way” did not describe what Blair realised in practice with his populist politics, but it seems to be what great system-creating intellects are destined for. Giddens' bestseller was also published in Hungary in 1999.)

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, former Danish prime minister, chairman of the Party of European Socialists, often uses the expression of progressive governance, because he finds that it covers much more than left wing in the traditional sense, or even than the designation “the third way”, not even mentioning social democracy. The two words, progressive policy, which may even be regarded as a slogan, are always printed on the title-page of the periodical publication of the Policy Network think-tank, which is the forum of European progressive minds operating under the control of Peter Mandelson, who was sent to Brussels by Tony Blair in summer this year as European commissioner responsible for trade.

At the end of the nineties an initiative called Progressive European Trend was founded within the Hungarian Socialist Party; in 1999 it published an essay with the title “Progressive Hungary in Europe”, in the writing of which I also played an active role. The ideas in connection with progressivism were outlined in this essay. Nevertheless, at that time the primary aim was to place the Hungarian left wing in the system of relations of European progressivism and to determine the political forces and the objectives with and for which we should unite within the European Union.

It is not for autotelic purposes or individual pleasure that I use the word progress to describe the group of phenomena defined by others as modern social democracy or – after Anthony Giddens, the main ideologist of the British Labour Party – the third way.

In my way of thinking, progress means more than just an effort to reform the left wing, because the stakes of the future of the left wing are higher: social democracy in the classical sense, as it operated, for example, in the United Kingdom or in Germany, is no longer an adaptable model. The British Labour Party has gone far beyond it, and German social democrats are progressing in the same direction.

So the stakes are not simply whether the Hungarian Socialist Party will transform itself into a modern social democratic party. This step could be done away with, if we start to work immediately on creating a progressive political party which takes into consideration all the good and bad lessons learnt from the experience of the Western European left wing to date.

I will describe all this in detail in the following chapters of the book, but first of all using an example, I shall explain what I mean.

One of the great achievements of western social democracy was the concept of the welfare state that spanned over several decades: relative workplace peace, extended unemployment benefit system, calculable pensions, modern healthcare, prolonged education. Now this welfare model has become exhausted, even the western economic systems have trouble maintaining it.

In practice, both the right-wing and left-wing elite have been trying to come up with new solutions since the eighties. For example, in the United Kingdom first Margaret Thatcher's government tried neo-liberal solutions, and then Tony Blair's cabinet experimented with the so-called third way solutions. Now both experiments have exhausted the reserves of their positive influence on the economic-social processes, and they are looking for new ways of answering the challenges.

I do not think that the left wing is the third way, on the contrary, I find that the greatest virtue of the new political situation is that the representatives of progress can choose far more alternatives. We must get rid of stereotypes: what makes China a communist country, and why is Taiwan regarded as a capitalist state? In China the great majority of the population is still engaged in subsistence agriculture in the country, while wild capitalism rages in the cities.

To avoid being misunderstood I need to point out here that I find that the basic differences between left-wing and right-wing forces are still valid, and by raising the above issues my aim is not to blur the distinct and sharp separating lines. All I am saying is that the left-wing of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the same as it was in the two centuries following the French revolution.

It is true, because now the achievable part of the political objectives announced then have become parts of everyday life: freedom, human rights, equality and solidarity, even if they are not asserted everywhere unrestrictedly, in the case of every person, but these concepts are now organic parts of the democratic operation of developed societies. More precisely speaking, progressive forces must define these principles in completely different contexts.

I agree with Norberto Bobbio, an Italian left-wing philosopher, that the sharp distinction between the Right and the Left is still valid in respect of describing the political fights of the present. It is so not only because we can define something that is definitely not right-wing as being left-wing, but also because although both sides are inclined to borrow ideas and instruments from each other, they are basically distinguished from each other by their approach to social equality.

In the last two centuries one of the achievements of the Left was that it significantly reduced social and financial differences between people. It is true even if there were some unrealistic ideas on the Left according to which equality should be achieved between all people also disregarding abilities and achievements.

The approach to equality is still a decisive difference in the case of the two sides on the political scene: the progressive forces are working on elaborating models that aim at reducing the burdens on those who live from their work, as the base of the Left is formed by people living on their income earned by working, including everybody up to the upper middle class. As opposed to this the Right, which remains loyal to traditions and represents the rights of the owners of capital even today and does everything to reduce their tax burdens.

The present progressive participants in politics must also face the history of the Left. It is especially true with respect to the Hungarian example, as the Left had exclusive power in Hungary for four decades. We must face this past even if we know that the Hungarian Left then and here seized political power with the help of the liberating and later on occupying Soviet troops rather than as a result of the democratic will of the people. Consequently the Russian political model was asserted, and the events that took place did not have much to do with Hungarian national or even Hungarian left-wing traditions.

All through the insurrection in 1956 against foreign oppression, left-wing forces played a decisive role, and there were many left-wing people also among the victims of the persecution that followed the repression of the uprising. The Kadarian “goulash communism” and “the happiest barracks” could be created mainly because the lessons of 1956 were taken into consideration. If we face the past sincerely, we must also see that from the middle of the sixties until the middle of the eighties, for nearly two decades, a significant part of the population lived in relatively good circumstances, free from political harassment. As compared to other members of the former socialist block Hungary achieved a lot. It is also proved by the fact that after the change of the political regime, disregarding the first parliamentary elections of 1990, the Hungarian socialist party won the elections three times in a row – considering the numbers of votes given to the political parties – and it was able to form a government twice.

In order to evaluate the past of the Hungarian Left in a subtle, detailed unbiased way, these facts must be taken into consideration at all costs. This statement is really addressed to the Hungarian Right, which should examine its own past – flirting with fascism and extreme nationalism – with at least as much self-criticism, as much energy as they invest in analysing the history of their political opponent.

After this short and unavoidably rough, but essential detour into an analysis of the Hungarian past, let us return to international concerns. In the last two centuries the left-wing movement of the world gained imperishable distinction in the enrichment of the material and spiritual possessions of mankind. The Right was able to protect its basically exploiting and selfish capital interests only temporarily against the Left. The great and bloody wars of the last century were all initiated by countries led by right-wing governments. Beside the disgrace committed in the name of left-wing world revolutionary ideas the Right also bears great historical responsibility for the mass massacres of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is also an important element of facing the past.

It must also be considered that social democracy, which is a decisive element of the international left-wing, is basically guided by the principle of conviction rather than looking for an opponent for autotelic reasons. It wanted and wants to convince the other side of the rightness of its own politics, rather than defeat it. It accepts the voters' intention. It was not the history of social democracy that was characterised by series of coups. In this sense the

Left obstinately and even inflexibly represents its arguments and refrains from demagogy, even if the voters' do not appreciate this sincerity and vote for those who make irresponsible promises.

Sometimes I think that the representatives of progress are driven by the consistent protection of the rightness of their standpoint rather than by winning the parliamentary elections.

I do not think that this approach should be necessarily followed, and sometimes I even find that all this is just autotelic obstinacy that easily leads to dogmatism. It is also dangerous, because the Left was always inclined to regard itself as a team of pioneers followed by the "dull" crowds left far behind; it is characterised by the approach "I will make you happy whether you like it or not".

The two centuries of the history of the European left wing was basically determined by the threefold slogan of freedom, justice and solidarity. Today it can be said that there is freedom in the whole of Europe. Of course not absolute freedom, because nationalism is still raging, ethnical tensions are still characteristic; we, Hungarians have our own bitter experience of how Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries are treated.

There are many more problems with the assertion of justice. Although there are laws, there is not always justice; neither in the world, nor in Europe, including Hungary. We have an awful lot to do in the field of creating the equitable society.

By saying this I am not at all saying that the Hungarian governments after the change of the political regime did not do their best for the great issues of justice – at least on a theoretical level they all supported them. At the same time, in connection with smaller issues of justice affecting people's everyday lives, the picture is not so clear. The income relations are still unfair. The Medgyessy-government tried to improve the situation of certain layers of society (pensioners, public servants), I still do not think that we would be right to call it an opportunity-creating government. Instead of creating opportunities that make it possible for those groups to catch up, it made payouts to those that used to be pushed into the background. I feel that this decision of the government was a mistake, even though I know that their intention was to remedy an injustice of several decades. It would have been a better idea to cover the pay rise of nurses from reorganising healthcare rather than from the budget.

At the same time small and medium-sized enterprises were not really supported by any of the governments in the last 14 years, while large enterprises were literally stuffed with allowances. It is not right, even if we know that in the shadow of large enterprises small and medium-sized enterprises are also able to develop. However, this development was due to their own resoluteness and perseverance rather than state support. It is also essential to make changes in this field before 2010.

I find that the introduction of a minimum wage for graduates is unjust and it was a mistake; not because the intellectual layer of society gets a disproportionately high income by this, but because the logic of the measure is not understandable: why is it the graduates that should receive this benefit. Are they more useful to society than any other layer? I find this type of distinction unjustified and basically inequitable, and it only creates unnecessary tensions. It is not clever to turn social layers against each other like this.

Upon similar consideration the misery of the majority of artists should also be eliminated, but so far nobody has come with a proposal that they should be given a minimum wage. Or where are the programs about supporting inventors? Individual entrepreneurs of necessity are just as defenceless as graduates, still nobody declares solidarity with them. Or I could also mention the problem of underfed children, which can have incalculable consequences in the long run.

While certain political forces are talking about the impossible situation of the peasantry all the time, they completely disregard the social layers mentioned above, which struggle with much more serious problems than agriculture. At last an answer should be given to the question: who is responsible for the unemployment of the masses of young people that graduate from colleges and universities? If with the qualifications they obtain they have no opportunity to find jobs, then there are very serious problems with the present system of education.

This also means that at present there is no institution that could analyse and forecast the demands of the labour market. There is no operating system which could show young people clearly what sort of career they should choose. When the time comes for final accounting, bad decisions turn out to be very expensive, and first of all parents, but even society and the state must pay their price.

There is a burning need for responsible political messages aimed at these and other similar problems. The progressive Left will change this practice.

Prolonging the learning process provides a solution only in the short term. We live in an accelerated world where there is no certain knowledge, because any knowledge obtained needs to be polished and updated permanently. This is why the intern system was created in the United States. The educational system can only determine directions, but the market is strictly selective. This is what we should prepare young graduates for.

Another item among the “little Hungarian inequities” is the Fidesz government system of home loans: it was financed by those who could not enjoy its advantages. Interestingly enough society – excluding me – approved of this measure, people only started to frown when delicate cases became known one after the other; at the same time it also had a positive effect, because social groups, such as the Roma, the members of which are often unemployed, could also get jobs.

The international solidarity of the former socialist block with Cuba, Vietnam and Angola is only remote memory now, just like COMECON, which did have progressive characteristics. Everybody produced something they could, and they could be sure to find a market to sell their products. The European Union is a more modern and more democratic COMECON. There is a program for this purpose, a program called the Stability and Growth Pact, in the preparation of which the left wing of the European Union played a decisive role.

Solidarity also has strange moments, such as, for example, the participation of Hungary in the Iraq war. We were never engaged in a dispute with Saddam or Iraq, but by sending Hungarian soldiers to Iraq, Hungary undertook solidarity with a coalition it wanted to join of its own will. So in this question the main motivation was to undertake international solidarity. In the United States they probably cannot see this point clearly, and the American government should be made aware of the fact that President Bush is profiting from the basic values of Hungarian social democracy by receiving our military support through the threefold slogan of freedom, justice and solidarity.

The right answer to global terrorism is not burying your head in the sand and trying to disregard it. Occasional, individual answers provide only temporary solutions. The only perfect answer to global terrorism is international solidarity; even if we are not directly affected.

The principle of social solidarity within the country is not asserted at all. Most people are looking upwards all the time, they are trying to get into higher positions and have a better financial situation. This is not a problem; this is the way of the world: people want to live well, they want to get higher on the social and financial ladder. It is a different issue that in Hungary people tend to believe that they are in a higher position of status than they really are. Unfortunately this understandable effort to get higher is not accompanied by solidarity towards those who are in lower positions. The individuals are not interested in supporting those who fall behind, as if they were exclusively responsible for their own situation.

For this reason, the progressive Left has a lot to do in connection with asserting social solidarity; whether it is about the Roma, the unemployed or old-age pensioners. In the course of determining tax policy guiding principles, it would also be essential to assert the aspects of solidarity.

The progressive Left does not only intend to achieve aims that are important for it, but also eliminate obsolete, outdated things. This often results in social conflict, but it does face these conflicts, as opposed to the Right, which obstinately insists on traditions, and experiences reforms as if its teeth were being pulled out.

In Hungary left-wing values are strongly embedded, the majority of people judge the activity of the government first of all on the basis of their social sensitivity. The majority of the Hungarian population might be right wing in their mentality and on the basis of the mental and cultural values they support, in other words they basically follow national and Christian ideas when they think about themselves and the country, still with respect to politics they mainly assert claims that can be identified with the Left.

People want a welfare society, they want jobs, security, solidarity, predictability, equal opportunities, adequate health and social care, higher pensions.

For this reason political life after the change of the political regime has been a history of the parties' attempts to overtake each other on the "left", nearly all parties are using left-wing means. Unfortunately, mostly, this only appears in the rhetoric, as economic politics followed in practice – whichever party we are talking about – have been mostly characterised by continuous restrictive measures. In their slogans, bordering on demagoguery, they are socially sensitive, but in practice they are characterised by statist, elitist acts: the state tells people what to do, the administration solves everything. It sounds just like the old Eastern-European terminology in a right-wing guise.

For 14 years the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) has faced an interesting situation in which its political opponents have been using left-wing language, even if they only show favour towards narrow interest groups with their acts. From the aspect of the socialists they were forced to face an impossible situation in 1994, when the Horn cabinet was formed, because in order to correct the economic mistakes made by the previous government they introduced restrictive measures which could not be regarded as left wing at all. Even despite this in 1998

we got more votes than the Right, it is a different issue that due to the complexity and interesting features of the Hungarian election system it was not us that was able to form a government. When we won again in 2002, although Péter Medgyessy's cabinet started its work by introducing numerous popular reforms, they soon had to slow down, because the resources for the social measures were not available. The welfare state cannot be financed any longer according to the earlier practices.

Obviously the processes inside the socialist party triggered by the resignation of the Prime Minister and his replacement at the end of August 2004 will not transform the MSZP radically from one day to another. The alternation of generations, the formation of a modern, developing left-wing representing progressive views takes several years. The period of six years before 2010 may be enough. By then even the society around the party will have probably changed, and there will be a need for sharp-featured, characteristic, stable left-wing traditions, leaders and, first of all, peace between the generations.

By then the miscellaneous nature of the governmental periods so far may become history, and at last socialists will follow left-wing politics and the Right will follow conservative guidelines. The political opponents may not be forced to overtake each other from the right or from the left any more, and they may stop using each other's political means. I am convinced that in 2010 the electorate will not vote against something or somebody, but for distinctively different programs.

Hungarian socialists will have to declare clearly that their program represents the interests of the participants of the whole working world and not the interests of bankers or capitalists. They support those who make their living from permanent or contractual work and not from their property or capital. In this sense small and medium-sized enterprises are also participants of the working world, as without working they could not support themselves or their families. At the same time the Left does not represent the interests of those who do not need to work any more, because they make a good living from the profits of their property, independently of the fact that often rich people work too, even if they do not need to. On the basis of the above it is clear that the top layer addressed by socialists is the upper middle class, and the circle ends here.

Talking about a national middle-class in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is historical anachronism. The expression used between the two world wars evokes bad memories anyway. At that time the attributive *national* meant segregation and later on persecution. I do hope that today even the conservative Right will allow itself to include it in its political program. Probably right-wing politicians insisting on creating the national middle-class and supporting it (this is the key word) really mean supporting a narrow clientele of family and friends.

Luckily the middle-class (without any attributive) does not need to be created, because it does exist, even though it is feeble, even though it has so many bleeding wounds, even though it does not represent such a wide class as in more developed countries. In Hungary it consists of three distinctive groups: historical elements, Kadarian elements and elements after the change of the political regime. It is an important aim of the Left to preserve and support all three groups. This is the layer or class which could be an example to follow for the losers of the period after the change of the political regime, for those who fell behind in the past and those who fall behind now, for the mass of three million people defined by Ferenc Gázsó as "wreck society", and they could catch up with this example, or at least their children can have a real chance to do so.

The present state of the Hungarian economy does not justify at all the strikingly large extent of poverty. The wreck society of about three million people represents an intolerable large proportion. I am convinced that we are facing distribution problems here, and new balances should be determined urgently in this field soon.

From this aspect both the measures introduced by Lajos Bokros and the increase of the minimum wage introduced by the Orbán cabinet were steps taken in the right direction. However, both measures were lacking the principle of gradualness. Bokros shocked significant layers of society, while the Fidesz government created a difficult situation for the entrepreneurial sphere; they had to face liquidity problems from one moment to the next.

In both cases the direction was determined well, but they forgot to provide a timetable with it.

The government that will finally start to make its way in the direction of significant tax reduction will hopefully introduce it gradually, from year to year. A ten-year schedule may be ideal, I do not know. But the reform of company, personal and consumption taxes can only be realised in a way that the parties concerned can adapt themselves to them in time; especially the state budget. The consumption tax should be reduced to a small extent, as this is one of the most correct tax types: you pay as much as you consume. All in all: a schedule suiting the policy is needed to reform the system of taxes, too.

Individual objectives in themselves are not worth anything, if the road leading to them is not outlined. For example, the rise of the minimum wage is essential, but it is nearly as important to raise the minimum pension at the same time. The system of pensions needs to be transformed anyway: for example, the value of pensions should be guaranteed to be two-thirds of the current active wage.

A significant group of pensioners today find that the most important question of creating balance is whether they can leave enough money behind for their heirs to hold their funeral. Unfortunately, most pensioners are not able to maintain the standard of living they achieved before they retired, however long they live. What mostly happens in practice is that the longer they live the poorer they get. The system of pensions is not characterised by the principle “it does not matter how long I live, I am already well-off”, although this principle should be seen as a natural thing.

Once we are talking about progress we should not avoid questions like this, because the case of pensioners basically belongs to the picture of the future. This problem should be placed in the centre of collective solidarity and responsibility. The bearing capacity of the economy may not support the two-third pension mentioned above, but it should not mean that we are not making an effort to find fair proportions and balances.

Social dialogue is needed. Within the foreseeable future agreements should be made gradually. We should be provided with built-in guarantees for peaceful years of retirement while we are still active.

A collective guarantee should be provided for the period between the retirement age and death, independently of how long people live for. Some may enjoy their years of retirement only for a year and some for even forty years. If someone retires from the middle-class, they

should not be afraid of sliding down into the lower layers automatically, but they should be able to stabilise the standard of living they have already achieved.

## New balances

*“The more corrupt the state,  
the more numerous the laws.”*

*(Tacitus)*

After World War II, following the reconstruction in Western Europe mostly financed from American capital inflow, the affected economies recovered extremely fast. Social democracy became a decisive political force in most western countries, both in governments and in the opposition. In the first few decades after the war the domestication of capitalism was completed, that is as a result of the activity of social democracy capital was tamed and the wild offshoots were pruned away. In nearly all of the Western European countries the concept of the welfare state became dominant. It can be regarded as one of the greatest achievements of the Left, of social democracy after the war.

However, from the eighties of the last century it became obvious that the welfare state was struggling with financial problems, the care systems created earlier became difficult to maintain, and the welfare state, which had been considered as an achievement before, was not the engine of economic growth, but rather an encumbrance to it. The neoliberal solution proposals of the Right gained space, and the present situation is characterised by a continuous fight between neoliberalism and the reformed social democratic concept including neoliberal elements.

However, looking at it from the aspect of progress neither of them seem to be the right solution in the long term: new balances need to be found in the economy and in society, radically reinterpreting the complete system of relations of individual responsibility and collective solidarity.

In the classical left-wing sense international solidarity stopped operating a long time ago. Before the nineties of the last century the still united communist system and even a significant number of western governments supported countries liberated from colonial oppression with various aid programs. Now this form of support has become rather restricted. On the one part the former communist countries are not helping any more, and on the other part the developed states and the international aid organisations are only giving morsels to the third world. And even this minimal amount of support becomes nothing due to the corruption raging in the nations in need of help.

At the same time it also became obvious that an increasing number of developing states are capable of stepping out of their seemingly hopeless situation. In the last few years the examples of India and especially China illustrate that countries that learn production and trade have a good chance of economic development. Consequently, it can be seen that the diseases of the developing countries cannot be cured with aid in the traditional sense, famine in the third world can only be stopped, if the affected countries are taught production with appropriately prepared programs. The amounts invested in this purpose will be returned in the long term much more than aid spent on occasional care.

Due to the rapid economic growth of India and China, the developed economies must also face significant challenges. In the last few years in the United States domestic industry required support again and again from the government against cheap Chinese products. As a

result of outsourcing parts of the service sector into India thousands of workplaces are being closed down in developed countries, and the governments affected are continuously accused by trade unions of not protecting domestic workplaces efficiently enough.

Balance disturbances can be seen in numerous fields of social life. The different political forces were taken aback by the explosion-like development of information technology. A spectacular manifestation of this is that all over the world, but especially in the developed countries the average expected lifetime increased significantly, and at the same time women feel less inclined to have babies. Developed countries – with a few exceptions – are ageing. This phenomenon can also be observed in developing countries, as the development of healthcare has its beneficial effects there, too.

Individuals leave the problem of reproduction to society, they do not feel responsible for it. “If I don’t have children, who will help me when I am old, I will just live off my pension”, people say to themselves. When the welfare state was still flourishing this mentality was justified, the system was still operating. However, now the resources have been overexploited, and it is not only due to the ageing of societies. Fewer people are working at the bottom of the tree of life too, as the majority of youngsters that become adults continue their studies, they start to work actively later now. Consequently a decreasing labour force must support an extending layer in need of support. The financing of pensions and education represents a burden on economies they cannot bear any more: the dream of the welfare state vanished. Society can no longer manage the costs of a longer and, at the same time, more expensive life. Sick and poor pensioners have had to learn different methods of survival. The pension system, which used to operate so well, has failed all over the world. Just think about it: instead of the expected period of 10-20 years of retirement, in most cases a period of 30-40 years needs to be financed by a decreasing number of active wage earners.

I must relate to individual responsibility again. First of all everyone must try and solve their own problems: while they are still active they should save money for their old age; they should undertake to have children who can support their parents when they grow up; and finally but no less importantly everybody should pay as much pension advance as they can, because active wage earners can expect the generation following them to treat them later on the way they treat the retired generation before them now.

Of course, there will always be individuals who get into a difficult situation through no fault of their own and cannot be accounted for individual responsibility. This is when collective solidarity should take action. Beside the amazing achievements of science and technology today it is not a problem at all to follow the history of the working activity of individuals all through their lives in detail. Those who ask for the community’s help should not protest when society rightfully wants to know the antecedents and the present circumstances to see what led to their difficult situation. With voluntary and controllable data provision everyone can demonstrate the factors that resulted in their social situation. Some may regard it as the state of Orwell’s Big Brother, but I am not afraid of this. The community will only request or monitor data, when the individual asks for help – otherwise the state has nothing to do with how its citizens live.

This solution proposal represents a humane approach, it rejects liberal answers. The system of relations of individual responsibility and collective solidarity unites the favourable features of individualism and socialism/social democracy. The point is not simply that in its present state the welfare state cannot be financed or continued. There are basic problems with the concept

of the welfare state, too. Its main fault is that it blurs the individual's responsibility. Individuals do not try to find a solution for their own individual problems, they expect help from society. A mass of such individuals would sooner or later restrain the dynamism of the economy.

Capital became global a long time ago, but the world of work fell far behind, it did not follow this process. This group of problems is in the centre of the theory of progress, and we need to talk and do a lot about it in the future. Tony Blair and Bill Clinton talked about the necessity of concluding an international social contract already in the nineties, but so far it has remained only an idea. What would this contract contain? It is simple: it would demonstrate the solidarity of the world of work on a global extent as well. The interest-asserting power of trade unions works well within the borders of the various countries, it is not surprising that capital is escaping from developed economies. Capital prefers areas where the interest-representation of employees does not work or where governments undertake the guarantee that it will not work.

In the international social contract stipulations could be made regarding that wherever capital moves in the world, it must accept that there are 33 working hours per week everywhere and the minimum monthly wage is 3 thousand dollars. What could global capital answer to this? It could not make separate deals, it would not receive special treatment, as all the states in the world would be bound by the international social contract. It would have no other choice but to co-operate with the world of work, and on a global level.

Presently in all countries, including Hungary, nearly without exception, employees are always afraid of capital moving out of the country and their factories being closed down. They would stop being exposed as a result of the contract. For once and for all it would terminate the howling injustices like, for example, while more than half of the population of the world is compelled to live on less than two dollars a day, in the European Union they spend nine dollars a day on a cow. Such intolerable disproportion and unsettled relations need to be put right as soon as possible. The followers of progress are trying to convince their governments that this international social contract would be useful. Although we believe in the free market, we must interfere with its operation, when it is not good for people.

In the last few years I have become convinced that new ideas about the reformation of society mostly come from the Central European region. Capital bought the western societies and corrupted them. People working there have nothing to fight for, but they are continuously paying for their lost chains. They do earn more than workers living in less developed countries, but capital exploits them too: while in the last decades their efficiency increased by fifty times, their income has not increased in proportion with it. Their workplaces are in danger too: either capital moves to cheaper regions, or immigrants coming from the developing world get the limited number of jobs for less money.

At this point the question of the trade union movement must be discussed. Today it is quite common even on the Left to demonstrate one's antipathy against employees' interest representation organisations. Probably, it is also due to the fact that trade unions are blamed for the problems of the operation of the welfare state. It cannot be denied that they often assert claims that are impossible to fulfil with the present financing possibilities.

What also made trade unions less popular is that during periods when the Left was in government they had too close relationships with those in power. They learnt a good lesson

that they should not become integrated in the governmental structure, because it is the state's task to regulate economic processes. The system of relations between the government and trade unions should be made as clearly distinct as in the case of the state and the church. Interest representation organisations should create a well defined partner relationship with all the – especially governmental – participants of economy. The original conditions should be restored, in other words the trade unions should have accounting relations with the employers and not with the state.

In Hungary, and in Eastern Europe in general, after the change of the political regime the degree of organisation of employees became disastrously low. Obviously it was also due to the fact that in the socialist era even trade unions were secularised, and instead of them employees expected the party leadership to improve their working and income conditions, and the trade union apparatus became an integral part of the party leadership. The lack of union organisation was also due to the fact that after the political and economic changes the majority of the former large socialist concerns fell apart, and they were replaced by a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises. The level of union organisation in these newly founded companies was next to nothing.

Today in Hungary the proportion of employees organised into some sort of union is below one-third, and it may be even lower in actual fact. Despite this the experience is that trade unions represent the interests of employees that are not members. It would be definitely better, if more employees joined interest-safeguarding organisations, because their claims could be better asserted. Probably trade unions can only be made more popular, if they are granted certain privileges, if they become an essential factor in creating social welfare.

It is a fact in political practice that during the period of a left-wing government, state institutes tend to establish partner relations with trade unions more than under a right-wing government, when the system of relations is often tense; although even they must admit that employees' interest representation bodies do play a very important role in maintaining social peace.

It should be made compulsory to state a part in employment contracts, where employees could make a statement regarding whether they want to become members of the trade union. According to the present practice there is a stipulation in employment contracts that employees must not perform trade union activities. It is clear discrimination, which must be stopped as soon as possible, and in the contracts the right of employees to belong to the trade union must be guaranteed. While it is completely right for churches and parties to keep out of the workplace, this is precisely where unions should be.

In the changed political and economic situation trade unions should be regarded as an institution compelled to co-operate with employers, rather than as the opposite pole to employers. Activists that lay emphasis on protesting as a starting point misinterpret their task: a partner relationship should be established with the company management and the state.

This partner relationship operates well, if trade unions also show a responsible attitude with respect to questions concerning their company. In Germany the trade unions at Siemens chose to give up a significant part of the benefits determined for the employees in the contract, in order to avoid jobs being lost. Responsibility also relates to observing labour protection rules or, for example, to prevent theft by employees. Trade unions could do a lot in the interest of increasing discipline and to create workplace conditions with which their company could obtain a favourable position in the market competition.

It is also important that trade union activists should not just talk for the sake of talking, and that those who do not their work properly should not be protected by interest safeguarding organisations. All these elements are decisive parts of the new balance that must be created between trade unions and the management of companies and the state.

The freedom small groups, all the associations, companies and grouping of the civil sphere must find their position in the new balance between society and the state. This also results in new proportions: what sort of tasks and what amount of tasks they take over from the state and with what sort of financial background they perform them.

As a starting point I must say that civil organisations, these basically self-organised initiations, should possibly finance their activity from their own sources; especially, if they are established because their members intend to indulge in their hobby or some activity in an organised form, in a community; for example, a rifle-club or a friends of animals society. Similarly to churches the principle of the club members supporting and maintaining their own club is also valid here! Obviously the situation is different, when an initiative for social purposes is launched, or if the state asks them to perform certain social tasks and provides them with the appropriate support to do so. At the same time I do not think that it is a good practice, because if the state passes on its own sphere of authority to a civil organisation, the question can be asked whether state support is needed in the given field at all?

Civil society becomes mature and strong, when it no longer needs central support. Only initiations that can stand on their own feet and are not in need of state allowances can act in a self-respecting way. I question the sense of establishing civil groups that have no other pursuit but to pocket money from the budget.

I find that civil associations bowing to the state are like the pig in the parable that starts a business with the hen and takes its own ham with it as its contribution to the “Ham and Eggs” company to be founded. It is only a few days later that the pig realises what a bad deal it made: the hen only needs to sell its eggs, but the pig has to cut off its own legs. This is what civil organisations are like that are led by the desire to obtain money from the state and creep into the favour of some power that cannot be their equal partner because of its proportions or influence.

Civil society operates well when it tries to perform tasks independently, using its own resources, because if it did not perform these tasks, then the government would take them over inevitably, and then citizens would have to pay more to the state budget in the form of taxes. For example, a well-operating organisation of voluntary civil guards means that in a given area a smaller number of policemen and patrol cars are needed, which means that individuals contribute with their own initiation to a cheaper state construction. If they ask for support to do this, then in the end they take money out of their own pockets, because the state hands out the taxpayers’ money.

Civil initiations are stronger in developed societies, and their protection is guaranteed by an appropriate legal background. Their existence is justified, necessary, but it is still not clear what sort of tasks they should really perform. First of all, the state should make it clear what sort of tasks it can and wants to perform from the tax income. Civil organisations can act freely beyond the line drawn by the administration as the border of its own competence.

In Hungary an enormous number of organisations are established that clearly aim for state money. I find that this attitude is improper. Civil organisations should be established for a given task, and if it happens to coincide with some state task in connection with which the state asks for help, then support can be granted.

In general civil organisations are not founded on the basis of political values, but it would be naive to think that they are free of politics. I think it is good a thing, if they keep equal distances from the different parties, but in many cases it is only a dream. Obviously they are closer to the side from which they get support, and the political standpoint of the leading personalities within a given civil organisation can also be decisive. I often say to my associates in the socialist party that we should visit civil organisations and introduce our ideas in the course of friendly discussions. It would be much more useful than trying to convince each other all the time.

There is nothing wrong about civil organisations having an opinion on political issues. For example, the Young Christians' Association or defence associations support right-wing conservative forces, while human rights and environmental protection movements prefer the Left. It would be useless to try and depoliticise associations and societies. No one can say that members are not allowed to discuss their political views during the meetings of various clubs, associations, hunting societies. I find civil organisations that deny talking politics hypocritical.

There are civil organisations, like, for example, the Parliament sports club, choir or hunting society, in the case of which due to the nature of the institute where the events take place it cannot be avoided that the members of different parties discuss certain political issues while they are having a beer together after playing football, for example.

I know from experience that it is not easy for the state to maintain a dialogue with the representatives of civil societies. First of all institutions of power cannot – and are not willing to – like everybody in the same way just because they are all civilian. On the other hand it is difficult to determine those aspects that decide which organisations are representative and which are not; which perform a real activity, and which are only fictitious; and it is absolutely impossible to determine how popular certain initiatives are.

Maintaining a dialogue is made even more difficult by the various civil organisations wanting to discuss things separately. I think that the right solution would be, if in the first stage the representatives of the separate groups interested in a given field, groups I call same batch organisations, agreed to their common standpoint, and then the state would only have to negotiate with the representatives of the common national opinion. At the local level things are obviously more complex.

As opposed to this the local authorities work well, if in their day-to-day operation they operate partly as a civil and partly as a state organisation. They have to answer to both directions, they have to be affected by both, but they have to be a little more open to the civil side. The state is in charge of control, the local authorities are in charge of execution, and the civil sphere is autodynamic.

There should be a social discussion about local authorities, because there are still numerous cloudy, unclear ideas about what their primary task is. Presently a lot of centrally financed state tasks are performed by local authorities. At the same time I find it a dangerous tendency

that the number of these tasks is increasing while the amount of money provided to perform these tasks is decreasing. One of the slogans repeated all the time by the followers of progress should be “More money for local authorities!”. But it is not enough just to repeat it all the time, they should also do something to realise it.

The state should withdraw in favour of local authorities, and at the same time it should cut back on spending and hand over sources to the local level. It will be left with far enough tasks that can only be centrally financed anyway (such as maintaining the army), but the majority of affairs determining everyday life will be in the competence of local authorities. The precise borderlines between the tasks of the state and local authorities should be clearly determined, not only on the national but even on the European level.

The question of corruption cannot be disregarded either. I am not trying to find excuses for the Eastern European political elite of the period after the change of the political regime, but those who interpret this problem as it was only the cancer of our region are mistaken. We are facing a worldwide phenomenon here. Often the salaries paid to Western European politicians does not explain their luxurious living conditions at all.

“There are two ways of making politics one’s profession: by living for politics or by living from politics”, said Max Weber nearly a hundred years ago, and added immediately that even this fact does not explain the personal enrichment of politicians.

Even those who are not in need of the possibilities of getting rich provided by power become greedy, in other words they do not live from politics, because they are so wealthy that even their grandchildren could live carelessly on what they already have. Or the other way round: those who live from politics are not necessarily thieves; just because it is their only source of income, they do not necessarily use their influence for unfair procurement of wealth.

I find it social hypocrisy when some people suggest that politicians should be paid average wages. First of all it is unfair, because the members of the political elite do not earn nearly as much as the managers of large concerns. Even in the west there is a difference in quality, politicians cannot afford luxury like company managers at all. Leaders in public life are exceptions who moved from the world of economy to the world of politics, such as, for example, Berlusconi, who built a successful business empire but is not quite as efficient in governing Italy.

Then it is also unfair, because politicians’ low income may increase the tendency for corruption. “Just make sure that you don’t get caught, you should tell good lies!” – would be the immediate consequence. On paper they would have an average income, but they would supplement their payments with different tricks. In this case society would experience two unfavourable consequences: the money that goes into politicians’ pockets would be taken away from society, and the consequences of the bad decision would also be born by it. Politicians should rather be given higher wages to avoid them making bad, corrupt decisions.

I believe that higher income does reduce the tendency for corruption. In a situation like this people think twice before they take a risk, if they have a good income anyway. It is true that there will always be some who are not satisfied with anything, but this attitude goes beyond the phenomenon of corruption.

It is not without good reason that the commissioners of the European Union get a high salary. There are not many cases of abuse in the news about them. If such cases do happen, then there is no place for indulgence, because these people cannot refer to a deprived childhood or to a lack of social respect.

Corruption is not easy to define, its borderlines are obscure, it appears in a different guise in each profession. Gratuity, restaurant tips, money given on the side to the car repairman – how could these be defined?

Corruption could only be fought back, if the participants in the economy carried out their activity under freer conditions. It is nearly a cliché that the more complex and the higher taxes are, the more corruption is present. The incomprehensible system of tax allowances is nothing else but institutionalised corruption. If we could make the manager of a large concern take an honesty pill, he would not stop for days listing all the different methods with which tax payment can be avoided. As opposed to this simple everyday people accept the tax returns prepared at their workplace without a word.

Similarly to other fields of everyday life, the system of taxes should also be radically simplified. Today in Hungary the amount of public burdens borne is very much determined by how much people are familiar with the rules of law. The system of taxes is good and fair, if the banker and the dustman have the same chance to understand it. I find it outrageously impertinent that work income is taxed more than capital income. They should be judged at least in the same way.

Similarly, international capital, which is escaping in panic to cheaper places, should also be restricted. With respect to consumers it asserts global prices, but as a producer its operation is not determined by this aspect at all. At this point again I would find it a really good idea to reconsider Bill Clinton's rejected suggestion regarding that large international financial transfers should also be taxed.

Today questions of environmental protection are also among the most important political issues and also the decisive elements of new balances. The written and electronic press showers people with alarming news radiating an end-of-the-world feeling about the global consequences of the greenhouse effect or the rising of the sea level due to the melting of the polar icecaps, or the unpredictable consequences of the reversal of the magnetic poles. Some scientists call for the suspension of experiments made in particle accelerator institutes, because they say that they could generate chain reactions similar to the "big bang" that resulted in the creation of the universe. Others have fears for mankind because of artificial intelligence, and many would stop experiments with nanotechnology too; the disputes about stem cells and cloning are not about science any more, but rather about ethics and religion.

People feel confused, they do not really understand what it is all about, and they become completely puzzled when it turns out that even the world of science is uncertain about things. Statements that seem to be well-founded are followed by refutations that seem just as authentic. Politics cannot provide appropriate information either, as in most cases decision makers base their standpoints on completely contradicting expert opinions.

In many fields science made such sudden progress that the specialists themselves are not aware of the consequences of their experiments. In the short term dangers cannot be detected, they may occur within a few decades, and then they may have unpredictable consequences. It

is especially true in connection with genetically modified plants: here and now it seems to be a good thing from the aspect of feeding the masses, but we cannot be certain whether it could have bad effects after a few generations. I can mention here the experiments of Árpád Pusztai, a biologist of Hungarian origin, who fed rats with genetically modified potatoes in his laboratory in the UK, and he was astonished to see the harmful changes rapidly appearing in the intestinal tract and in the immune system. Not long after he made the results of his experiments public, he lost his job, because there were some biologists who refuted his data immediately.

If there are such basic disagreements between well-prepared scientists, then how could outsiders who are not educated in these topics take sides?

They obviously do it on an emotional or moral basis. The so-called green thinking, the attitude of those who are worried about the condition of our environment is mostly characterised by emotional exaltation. There are many cases of extreme manifestation, the questions arising are seldom thought over with a clear head. Science has a great responsibility in this, as often the specialists themselves create apocalyptic visions. They publish pessimistic analyses, which can only be regarded as theoretical presumptions in most cases, too early, before discussing them on the compulsory professional forums.

And then there is so much talk about global warming, in connection with which there are a lot of unexplained circumstances. Many people tend to forget that the climate of Earth changes or has changed in the last few millennia or in shorter periods significantly even without any human intervention. For example, not many people know that from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the 1800's there was a so-called small ice age in Europe, even the Danube froze over regularly. We could also say that the warming of the climate today is returning to the earlier conditions. And this is not being cynical, because unfortunately the responsibility of both mankind and nature in the seemingly abnormal environmental changes has not been made appropriately clear.

Of course these things do not affect those who worry about the environment, who create hundreds of groups, associations, organisations or movements that concentrate exclusively on one thing, environmental protection. I do not question their good will, but I do not think that these simple single-aimed organisations can be the answer to the given questions. Due to their one-sided, restricted approach they are unable to create a comprehensive picture of the phenomena, in larger contexts. Let me borrow a nice and true picture used by the protectors of the environment: when a butterfly flutters its wings in the rainforest of the Amazon, it might create a raging hurricane over Florida. On the basis of this example I find it logical that the questions raised by the protectors of the environment should also be placed in larger contexts, and this should be the task of politics, especially the progressive side.

In the case of the greens I would be more careful about sounding exalted opinions in connection with questions such as, for example, the radar station on Zengő mountain. I agree that the construction disturbs and endangers the rare species of animals living there. I also accept that the road to the radar station does not suit the environment. But similar objections could also be made in connection with other places. The construction of a radar station is justified because we belong to NATO and because of Hungary's geographical situation, even from the aspect of environmental protection. If Hungary contributes to the protection of the organisation's airspace by constructing radar stations, then Hungary is expected to operate a smaller number of military aircrafts, which means that Hungary needs a smaller air fleet.

Consequently: fewer fighter aircraft boom above us, the fuel consumption is less, and fewer military airports are needed. It is obvious that thinking in contexts would also take the affairs of the greens forward, which is presently not really possible due to their exalted approach. It is a different question again that a public debate should have been held in connection with the radar station on Zengő mountain, everybody should have been given the opportunity to give their opinion, and a decision should have been made only after this. I cannot emphasise enough that collective solidarity can only be expected, if individual responsibility has been sorted out. Objections should not be made for merely autotelic purposes, first we should see what we can do ourselves, and make sure that we take all aspects into consideration in the course of making our standpoint.

The regulation of the Danube is another continuously reoccurring topic. In this question again emotions decided over rationality. It has been forgotten by now that before the dam at Vaskapu was built, Hungary was a significant caviar exporting country. Sturgeon used to swim up far north from the Black Sea, and Hungarian fishermen could make a good living trading with the fish and its caviar. But there are no sturgeon and no Hungarian caviar export any more. By now the dam at Vaskapu has become a part of the landscape, we have accepted it. And if we compared our present environment with an much earlier one, let us say the environment of the time when the Hungarians arrived in the Carpathian basin in the late eight hundreds, we would be astonished to see the difference. At that time the Great Plain between the Danube and the river Tisza was a marshy, boggy area. After deforestation, draining the land and planting birch and acacia trees the level of the groundwater went down by about 8-10 meters. As a result of this in the last century the area between the Danube and the river Tisza significantly changed, and now the UN FAO has declared it a semidesert.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century our predecessors regarded the regulation of the river Tisza as a great achievement, and from many aspects they were right to be proud. But at the same time they forgot about the fact that the river and its branches created a significant water surface on a 10-15 kilometre wide area along the two shores, which disappeared after the regulation. As a result of this at many places the system of dams along the river tower several metres above the settlements, and the groundwater has gone down dramatically. They tried to overcome these anomalies by creating Lake Tisza, and today efforts are made to realise the further development of the Vásárhelyi plan in order to restore the earlier water surface.

We must accept that people and nearly all aspects of human activity significantly form and change the environment. Agricultural activity is one of the greatest nature-forming forces. Just think about deforestation, changing soil quality, using chemicals on the land. People also form a part of nature, and the vital functions of civilisations have been significantly transforming the environment for ages. Artificial interventions already form natural parts of planet Earth. Often we cannot predict the consequences of human intervention, but I must emphasise again that people and their activities are also parts of nature. Terrible natural disasters happened even before people appeared, and an innumerable number of species of the flora and fauna died out even without the intervention of human kind.

However, all this cannot excuse us from responsibility. We must try to keep the balance of nature according to our abilities and our knowledge. We must be extremely careful, but always in a system of contexts. On the north shore of Lake Balaton settlements and forests are invaded by caterpillars every ten years, and the inhabitants do not understand why it is not allowed to kill them by spraying. If the authorities decided to do it, the inhabitants would

revolt against the fish dying in the lake because of the spraying. One does not shoot at sparrows with a cannon.

Environmental protection is basically a question of balance. All interventions in the ways of nature call for enormous care. Even changes that seem absolutely innocent must be modelled and discussed with the concerned parties and specialists before making a decision. Environmental protection is a social investment, with a less subtle word: business. The smallest amount of money invested may result in enormous savings later on. Luckily environmental protection technologies are well developed; they are also expensive, but still cheaper than saving on them and paying a lot for the consequences. Prevention means sparing. Often environmental protection is not a spectacular investment, but it is not money down the drain either. It costs more to eliminate damage.

Environmental protection is one of the few issues in which there is no exclusively national aspect. It is an area where the significance of international unity goes without saying. For example, no rivers have their source in Hungary, we are a recipient country: it is important what the quality of the water is like that crosses the border, how much it has been contaminated by the neighbouring countries. In many cases environmental damage returns to its origin, let us just think about Romanian pollution that flows across Hungary, but then it returns to Romania again via the Danube. In this sense all countries bear responsibility: both for themselves and for the neighbouring countries. At the same time the question of keeping back carbon-dioxide emission can only be answered with a global solution. All nations must comply with the strict restrictions. It should be a primary aim to have environmental protection prescriptions observed everywhere, because it is a question of business, it has a basic effect on economic performance. Those who disregard such investments are in a more advantageous situation in the competition. The European Union has the prescriptions observed in its member states relentlessly. It is a different issue that outside the Union it is not obligatory, and the member states are at a less advantageous position as opposed to those who resist. It would be significant progress, if at least on the continental level an agreement was made in connection with terminating technologies that are harmful to the environment.

I support the idea of finding new resources, as traditional coal and oil resources are being used up and, anyway, they pollute the environment. For example, the utilisation of wind power is an exciting, interesting field. If you drive across the Austrian border by car towards Vienna, after a few kilometres you can see the shapeless, ugly wind-power plants occupying huge areas. I know that basically it is not a question of aesthetics, and coal and oil processing plants are much uglier, they still do not fit in the landscape, and, what is more important, they disturb the animals living there too. The vibration generated by the huge blades drives away everything, from beetles to large mammals in an area several kilometres wide. Although it really is a clean source of energy, it too has its own undesirable side effects. I must point out here that in Hungary there are prescriptions relating to the distance that should be kept between certain protected species of birds and human activity. I find it an exaggeration, as I pointed out above, I think that people also form a part of nature as well as the artificial facilities created by them, like, for example, the enormous windmills whose designers left the fauna of the area out of consideration for some reason.

In a certain sense nuclear energy is also clean, and it is becoming widely used in the world. If we think about it, solar energy is also created by nuclear fusion, although it is true that it gets to Earth in a weakened form, in the form of light and heat. However safe atomic power seems now, a lot of questions are still waiting to be answered in connection with it. There are an

alarming high number of industrial accidents; the effects of Chernobyl can still be experienced today.

If there is not enough energy, saving it could be the most efficient method. Air-conditioning units are regarded as a great invention, all over the world there are at least as many of them as cars. They could represent a serious hazard, as air-conditioning devices heat the environment in the hottest periods. I wonder how harmful they are. Ancient Romans and also people living in other parts of the world invented appropriate architectural solutions against heat, and these solutions worked quite well up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but then they got forgotten after air-conditioning was introduced. A long time ago Hungarian peasants used to build their cottages so that they worked as natural thermal regulators: they were cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

During recent years power plants changed over to using firewood: there is a growing demand for forest wood and tree-stumps pulled out of the ground. As a result of this prices have become very high, and many people in the provinces cannot pay the price of firewood. We do not hear much about their complaints, while in towns the 10-15% increase of energy prices created a general outcry.

The European Union supports the growing of plants to be used as fuel, and Hungary must also make use of this possibility. Energy grass crops can be grown in Hungary, they have a greater energy value than brown coal, and its industrial production is cheaper than importing gas. An area of a hectare and a half can cover the annual energy demand of a family house.

In connection with the future I think it is necessary to think it over that as providing energy is a public service, similarly to tax accounting there should also be energy accounting between the state and its citizens. All types of energy – including water – get to the consumers with significant state support: building power plants, setting up networks, maintenance, and so on. The more one consumes, the more one has to pay. A method similar to tax rates should be introduced. Everybody could account for the energy they used, and it would also be favourable, if the state provided the consumers with information about the amount of central support. As a result of this more people would realise that energy saving is not only an environmental protection concern, but also a question of money.

## Development and innovation

*“I would rather lose in a cause that will some day win, than win in a cause that will some day lose.”*

*(Woodrow Wilson)*

All governments in the world, without exception, endeavour to demonstrate their success by presenting the results of the economy, and in order to do so they create appropriate short-term and long-term programs. At the same time economics is an area of activity in which governments can be especially destructive, while hardly building anything. 150 years ago Karl Marx pointed out that economics has objective laws, which proved to be true during the development following the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although several governments failed to live up to the false hopes that they could control the, often unpredictable, processes.

A long time has passed since Marx, but his thoughts on the objective laws of economics are still just as valid. The economy is like nature: we think that we know it inside out, but it never shows us its true face. Suddenly, from one moment to another, changes may occur the twirling hurricane of which may destroy towns, and the erupting volcanoes of which may explode islands or push islands up above sea level.

Governments cannot stop volcanoes from erupting, and similarly they have little influence on economic processes. It would be an illusion to think that with different monetary, commercial and political tricks Hungary could influence decisive economic processes. Only the really great ones can do this, especially the United States, which also has the key currency. The interference of any other national economies is only like a fleabite. The only tool small economies have is adaptation, trying to make agreements with large economies.

However, the objective rules of economics often create unpredictable, unexpected situations even for the largest nations. Even the various forecasts cannot provide real support in predictable planning. Recently there was a general outcry when Shell, one of the most significant oil production companies in the world, made an announcement that they had badly miscalculated the size of the oil reserves. It turned out that they could produce less than that stated in their business plan by an order of magnitude.

Talking about oil: the global economy, and nearly all national economies, were shook to the roots by the rapid increase of the price of oil on the world market in the summer of 2004; in August it was over 50 dollars per barrel. Preliminary plans collapsed one after the other: the profit of those who were well off was eaten up by the high price of oil. At the same time struggling economies, such as the Venezuelan and Russian economy, suddenly got stronger. Hugo Chavez invested the sudden and unexpected profit into social policy developments, and as a result of this it was not surprising at all that his right-wing opposition lost at the referendum.

Today, specialists more or less agree that correct theories on economics regard the concept of sustainable development as the correct method of approach the world must follow. Macroeconomic balances and directions of development should be defined that do not result in irreparable damage in other fields of life.

Specialists also unanimously agree that the only thing that drives development is innovation. This is definitely good news for the Hungarian economy, even though the present processes are determined by the opposite of this. It cannot be doubted that presently the development of the Hungarian economy is absolutely restricted by social reflexes that have an impeding effect on innovation. Despising innovations is a real national disease.

Most Hungarians are averse to new solutions. But Hungarians are not alone in this, as in other member states of the European Union, and even in the institutes of the EU inflexible insistence on standard methods represents a great problem; for more than a decade they have been desperately looking for the path of innovation, but similarly to us they find it difficult to move on. The European Union needs more courage to solve the problems towering in front of it.

I think that the European Union is making a big mistake by not introducing the Euro in each country consistently. It should be done, at any cost, despite all the objections. The uniform use of the common European currency could be the real driving force of the EU, which could change the economy within a few years. According to the present plans the Euro will not be introduced in Hungary before 2009; but I would like it to happen tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow at the latest. And I would not mind being despised for it! However, it will only happen in 2009. At the same time it is a fact that already in 2004 there are retail businesses that have 5% of their turnover in Euro, not talking about Euro-based credit cards.

We must face the fact that today small nations do not have an independent economic policy in the classical sense any more. Now international companies have grown so big that they far exceed the economic power of most countries. There are multinational companies that increase the GDP by 10% when they come to the country, and decrease it by the same amount when they leave, restricting our room for movement somewhat.

The question now is not how much foreign capital enters a country but rather what sort of activity it performs and how long it intends to stay here. It became quite clear in recent years that large foreign concerns coming to Hungary try to settle down near the borders suiting the direction in which the European Union is extending, because by doing so they can reach consumers in several countries.

In this context from the aspect of the country the amount of tax is irrelevant. It does not affect really important processes, they are controlled by global capital. National governments cannot see into it and cannot affect it. The only thing they can do is use it cleverly, but I shall discuss this later.

Hungary should be much more confident in economic decisions. The most important task of the government is to remove all hindrances obstructing the introduction of innovation. It is a wrong approach to say that for this you need money, money and more money. The general approach should be changed completely: if this can be done, it can be regarded as half a victory on the path towards success.

I find it tragicomic, typical of Hungary, that the majority of Hungarian innovations could only be realised abroad, they could not become successful at home. The Rubik cube and Túró Rudi (a chocolate covered sweetened cottage cheese bar) are rare exceptions. The general situation is characterised by us spending tens of billions on enticing multinational companies to the

country. It nearly sounds like a joke that we are spending loads on the innovation of foreign companies saying that nothing is too expensive, but we invest hardly anything in our own innovative efforts. We vote for the certain solution, we do not undertake the risk involved in helping domestic initiatives. In this field we should be much more confident.

With respect to the long-expected economic boom, in two important fields Hungary is in a more favourable situation as compared to most of the neighbouring countries. Firstly our climate is very good, secondly as compared to the size of the population a surprisingly large number of innovative persons live here. It is true, however, that the latter factor is detained by a social environment that has an aversion to innovation.

It must be made a part of our national identity that we live in God's Garden of Eden, and one of our great virtues is our diversity. It is not a shame that we learnt good things from the other peoples that came to live here, and the positive features of so many nations are in our blood now. Hungary has a good chance of becoming a real "mini" melting pot in Europe.

I think it is quite possible that soon Hungary could become a fashionable place to visit, live and work. We have everything for this, only the social environment should be made more open. Nothing bad can happen, if the talented citizens of other nations come to live in Hungary, because they can develop here. The United States has not become a service nation just because the cream of the international world gathers in New York!

Our economic policy should support all types of innovative activity. We should build a country where it is worth living, where it feels like recreation to visit, like a good pub, which is good because so many people go there. Hungary should be made attractive!

Those nations are well developed that make good use of their relatively advantageous situation. In Iceland fishing is obviously the leading industry, but it is less known that they are also at the top in aluminium production on a worldwide scale. There is no bauxite on the island, but there is a lot of energy, and as aluminium production requires a lot of energy, Iceland makes good use of what it has.

I can also mention an Irish example. If in a group of people I asked the question which is one of the most important Irish exported articles, it is very likely that not many people would mention the popular liqueur, Bailey's. But it is true, this national innovation product uses 25 percent of Irish milk production. The Irish realised that they had an oversupply of whiskey and milk: they mixed the two and obtained a sweet drink, which is popular everywhere in the world, including Hungary. What is it, if not innovation? I could also mention the examples of Parma ham or Port wine. Both of them ingenious national inventions, and both the Italian and the Portuguese profit a lot from the export of these products.

Probably not many people remember that in the fifties tinned stuffed pepper and stuffed cabbage were quite popular Hungarian products even abroad. In the fifties both products represented a serious export item in Hungarian foreign trade. They were really popular in Europe, and even the United States ordered a significant amount. They were popular products, because they tasted nice and they were nourishing, the same food contained meat, cereals and vegetables; an ideal composition.

We all know what followed next. Neither of these products remained significant exported articles, although they could be successfully distributed, but unfortunately we are not very

good in the field of sales. In the fifties we were pushed out of the market with our tinned stuffed pepper and stuffed cabbage, because in the lack of appropriate marketing we could not keep up with the market competition.

We are not very good either in propagating our own products or achievements. For example, here is the example of Audi Hungária, one of the leading Hungarian companies, and its product, the Audi TT Coupé is one of the best cars in the world in its own category. How many Hungarians use it? How many Hungarian suppliers take part in its production? Not many. In fact very few. Despite this, on the car you can read the country of manufacture: Made in Hungary. How many Hungarians know that this excellent car industry product contributes to our nation's good reputation in many countries of the world? Not many.

In cases like this I always think that on socks produced in the United States they are so proud to print: Made with pride in the USA. Why couldn't we do the same, what prevents us from doing so? In Hungarian tourism publications the three colours of the national flag can be seen quite often now. It is a very good idea. Why couldn't we print these colours on Hungarian products and write on them: Made with love in Hungary?

The national bird of New Zealand, the kiwi bird is printed on all their products. We also have a legendary national bird, a mythical eagle that we call the "turul". We could use it as a brand name everywhere we can, for example Turul stuffed cabbage or Turul stuffed pepper. It is not at all funny, we must be brave enough to use what we have, we should not be afraid of innovations. The word "turul" is a very nice Hungarian word, it also sounds good in foreign pronunciation.

Both our national dishes mentioned above can be seen on the menu of Hungarian diplomatic receptions, and I always find that these are the first dishes to disappear from the table. It shows that foreigners like them too. It would also be a good idea, if the authorities ordered all Hungarian restaurants to put stuffed pepper and stuffed cabbage on their menu. Does it sound like a rough intervention? It is not; it could be a part of national marketing, if we are clever enough. We must be able to make use of what we have, we must make use of the advantages that are characteristic only of us, Hungarians. Only those nations make progress that deal with something they know a lot about.

There is nothing new in this train of thought, we just tend to forget about things. Even in the despised socialist world before the change of political regime they knew what comparative advantages meant. COMECON, for example, tried to realise the same and called it specialisation. It was not a bad idea, without specialisation the Eastern European political system would have fallen apart much earlier than it actually did. Today we smile at the idea of the convertible Rouble, but it was a clever thing to introduce in the accounting between the national economies. We are still proud of Hungarian Ikarus buses in return of which we used to receive oil from the Soviet Union.

Never before in Hungarian economic history did we use our comparative advantages as well as within COMECON. I do not want to be misunderstood, I do not wish those times back, but we must still acknowledge the good things in it, and we should examine what we could adopt from it. It is good for the economy to concentrate on what it can do, to produce something in which it is the best. This is the only tool in the hand of national governments, all the other important things are decided by global capital anyway. If we define ourselves cleverly, in some form it can help us regulate international capital.

I am not a pessimist, when I say that the ambitions of national governments can go as far as cleverly creating their own selection of products. This not a restricted area at all, defining ourselves involves a lot of tasks. This determines an economic field which cannot be reached with classic fiscal or trade policy economic-political intervention in the case of small countries, because only the really great ones can exercise them.

Today marketing is one of the most important parts of economic life, already in the designing phase it must be considered how products can be sold. Products are thoroughly designed starting from the idea all the way to selling them to the consumers. Marketing is a serious cost factor, and they make consumers pay for it. Such marketing factors significantly determine the economic growth of a country; much more than classic economic tools, such as incentives, the tax system or low-cost loans. These remain important, but not exclusive.

The Swiss watch-making industry became world famous not because of special taxation rules, but because of the idea realised and the marketing allocated to it. Precise, reliable, elegant, like a Swiss watch. It is a good example of combining national characteristics and products. The Japanese came up with their electronic watches, but they could not supersede the Swiss, who were clever enough not to stick with mechanical structures, they developed and today they are market leaders even in this field.

The freedom of the market in itself is not worth anything, the work using the market is the decisive factor. It is not use believing in the market, if there is nothing to trade with. All the various taxation systems and rates are not omnipotent either: they may be useful to correct unfavourable processes, but a country's economic policy cannot be based on them. All nations, all companies sell themselves, their history, their existence, their culture, their identity on the market. Those become successful who can convince others that they are important, because they are special.

Let me illustrate it with a negative example that we Hungarians cannot even use unexpected opportunities. When Imre Kertész was granted the Nobel Prize in literature, he entered literary history as a Hungarian, as a writer recording the sufferings of the whole of Europe. This is why he received this prominent prize. At the same time in Hungary he was treated unjustly, and the country has not made use of the possibility provided by having a Nobel Prize winner. In Hungary people were discussing how much tax he would pay and where. It was a great historic compensation for us that at last a Hungarian writer was granted the Nobel Prize in Literature. It is a great honour, they appreciate it everywhere in the world. We still have not exploited the possibilities it offers. Imre Kertész is still living in Berlin, they appreciate him more there.

Governments do great harm when they fail to exploit such possibilities, when they just strengthen the feeling of defeatism in a nation. Psychological factors contribute to economic growth just as much as the application of various rules. Mass psychosis can be just as useful as harmful, if used well. Since the change of political regime Hungarian governments have not achieved much in this field. The four government cycles steadily guided us into the dead-end street where we are now. This dead-end street is the national hysteria of underestimating ourselves.

Mostly small and medium-sized enterprises rely on innovation, and they react to it the most efficiently. For them it is of utmost importance to manufacture a given product with the best

possible conditions. Success is vital for them, and often they achieve success with their feeling for the new. Small companies are the fastest and the most flexible to react to market challenges. I must repeat that it is not small companies that should be supported, but the factors hindering innovation that should be eliminated.

It is not the same when in a region there is a large company employing 300 people or there are 300 small enterprises. In both cases the tissue of the economy is completely different. I think that the latter case has a more favourable effect on its environment, as small enterprises get into all tiny capillaries, with their operation they influence the whole region. With their success they have a basic influence on the general feeling of those who live in the region.

One of the key factors of a nation's good national condition is the quality of the country's administration apparatus, the so-called bureaucracy. I agree that the aim is not to create a cheap state but to create the cheapest possible state. Slimming down should never be done to the detriment of efficiency, because then citizens complain about slow, hesitating administration. There are certain state functions, such as the operation of the police, which could be shared with local authorities, but obviously the tasks should be allocated very carefully, due deliberation is also needed in the field of financing.

Politicians are unavoidably exposed to the professional administration, which performs tasks assigned to civil servants as a result of the principle of sharing power. Even the best political intentions can be overthrown by the sabotage or indifference of the bureaucracy.

State administration has no power leaning on its own financial income, but it is compensated quite well by means and decision-making possibilities assigned by politicians, the main representatives of power. On the basis of my experience I have drawn the conclusion that we tend to underestimate the power and cost of the bureaucracy.

What is the size and the character of the state apparatus needed? First of all the sphere of public services should also be precisely defined within the European Union. For example, how large should a country's army be? How should we decide in this question in Hungary: an army of 30 thousand or 60 thousand would be ideal? Who knows? How many members should the Hungarian national assembly have? These are all questions that should not be overcomplicated, in most cases the decision is a question of political intent.

I think it would be lucky, if the administrative apparatus did not use more than one-fifth or one-sixth of the total national income. Any tax reduction would involve bureaucracy cuts, because the same staff cannot be maintained from less money.

Dealing with the question of the extent of the average tax burden level is like engaging in polemics. I have no better answer than to say that the right level is what people can pay voluntarily and readily. On the basis of my experience I find that realistically this level should be between 20-30%, although in general much more than this must be paid in nearly every country. We could also try to set the maximum tax burden level at one-third of a person's income. The political elite would profit a lot from concluding such an agreement with society. It would be a real reform, and it would significantly improve public general feeling.

Today in Hungary no social layer can feel that the governments have done or are doing something for them. Often even graspable economic growth has no effect at all on people's general condition.

It is worth dealing in detail with the role and possibilities of women in society, because I think that presently politics unjustly pays little attention to them, although they play a decisive role in influencing and improving general social condition. Women's threshold of pain is much higher than men's, they can tolerate things infinitely, so generally they do not support reform, they insist more on traditions. When changes do come, they adapt themselves to them quicker than men. This shows their great adaptability. Due to their feeling of responsibility with respect to their family they have a more complex approach to the world, they are able to make decisions, and they prefer long-term solutions as opposed to men who are more interested in immediate advantages.

It may also be due to their biological abilities that in the course of making their decisions they take all the possible consequences into consideration. They are able to make real decisions, which influence even deep social processes. A good example of this is the question of increasing the population: contraceptives liberated women to a great extent, in the question of having children they are nearly exclusively the only decision-makers. It is very important from this aspect too for the followers of progress to convince women of the significance of the reproduction of society, to convince them to have children! I am one of those who are not at all afraid of the overpopulation of the Earth, because I believe that nature's self-controlling processes will take care of the appropriate balance.

Bringing up children should be recognised as a profession: society is the employer. Women who undertake to bring up children should be paid a minimum wage for each child. If they have three children, they should receive three times the minimum wage, and so on. If it is the husband who looks after the children, then he should be paid the same amount. It is not a family allowance, it is a salary! Under such conditions all women can decide whether they choose to have a career or children. If they have two or three children, they can earn more than those who work, and society would also acknowledge the importance of bringing up children in this sense.

The economic success of the United States is not only due to the strength of the dollar, but also to the permanently positive birth rate. The American population is continuously increasing, and it also affects good economic results.

Bringing up children should be recognised as work up until children complete their secondary school studies, to a maximum age of 20. After this time women should be provided with the possibility of continuing their studies or going to work, and the years spent in bringing up children should be counted towards their pension. At workplaces men and women should be employed in the same proportion, as a form of positive discrimination. No distinctions should be allowed in salary either.

No such rate should be applied in respect of young employees, because while a given age is only a temporary condition, one's sex is a given thing that cannot normally be changed.

It does not mean at all that the problems of young people should not be dealt with. On the contrary, it would be very important to make them feel comfortable, enable them to create a picture of the future, make them proud of being Hungarian.

Generally it is the younger generations that come up with new ideas and innovations. And it is right, this is the way it should be. As a middle-aged person I would like to see the Hungarian

economy grow as a result of the innovations of young people, and I would also like to benefit from this growth. Unfortunately, at present there are not many signs of such development. If the young population of the world between the age of 20-30 were asked in a public survey in which country they could earn a good living, Hungary would probably be among the least mentioned countries.

Young people have an important role in the development of the economy also from the aspect of a positive birth rate, that is to achieve that the number of children born is higher than the number of people who die. Obviously young people should be presented an appropriate picture of the future to encourage them to found families and have children. Similarly to elderly people they should also be given equal chances. Instead of being pampered they need to be provided with opportunities.

Here is the question of education. This field is of primary importance among the possibilities of young people. It is in society's elementary interest to enable young generations to study in the framework of a fairly financed education system. The system of social invoices should also be asserted in this field. Patient invoices have been introduced in healthcare, but in other fields of life too citizens are well aware of how much it costs to have access to certain resources, such as energy or water, for example.

Education should be free until graduation from secondary school, until the age of 20 at the maximum, and society would not even issue a symbolic invoice for this. In the case of skilled workers the first trade can be learnt free of charge, but an invoice would be issued to make them see how much their training cost. The same should stand for other specialisation courses not yet providing higher qualifications: they are free of charge, but an invoice is issued to show the costs.

The social accounting system would be used in college and university education. Those who apply to continue their studies in higher education would be provided with information about all university institutes regarding how much it costs to complete a course. Obviously if applicants can present outstanding results, their training can be free of charge. In other cases they would have to pay for their course, which costs a certain amount of money. Everyone would have to pay according his or her means. Some of them will not require any support from society, because the financial situation of their family allows them to do so. Those who live in poorer, more modest circumstances will have the possibility to obtain support via scholarships.

Students can apply for money from non-refundable study-support funds from which they can finance their training, but not their examination failures. In their application they would have to give a detailed explanation of why they chose the given university, what plans they have regarding their professional future and what sort of family background they have. The data they give can be easily checked, so there is no point in lying in connection with their financial situation, for example. If they require help from society, they should not be offended, if society checks up on them to see whether they really need help or not.

The main point of this higher education financing system is that the consumers, the students can decide in which institute they want to spend their allowance rather than centrally transferring the allowance to higher education. If the tax is collected from individuals, then distribution should be based on this principle too. Pensioners should also receive their healthcare budget, and they should be allowed to decide whether they want to spend it on

medicine or therapeutic massage. At least it would become clear where society should invest more.

Another advantage of this system is that market relations could be asserted more. Students standing between society and educational institutes should decide which branch or institute of higher education should be given more money. Educational institutes would also become interested in reforms. In the new situation they could not afford having a weak teaching staff or bad infrastructure. Every year they would have to compete for students. This method would be more efficient than the incomprehensible prestige fights for the distribution of central resources.

Young people should also be given opportunities, because this active layer bears a great burden in maintaining pensioners. Young people deprived of equal opportunities feel less inclined to support the elderly; even if they are aware of the fact that they will be treated in the same way when they are elderly as they treat pensioners now.

If they feel responsible for their old age when they are in their twenties, if they want to establish their pension while they are still young, then they should pay as much as possible to the pension fund now, while they are still active. It should be regarded as a kind of social credit. All young generations are obliged to take care of the old generations, but it is not as simple as that. Those who pay pension contributions now are investing in their own future in the end.

The economy's future is always more important than its present. Capital trusts economies that spend money generously on the elderly, because they radiate that they have a picture of the future and believe in their economic strength. For this reason the case of pensioners cannot be restricted simply to the problem of the elderly, but it should be regarded as a question basically affecting the future, determining the picture of the future. Every society creates its own picture of the future as they treat the elderly in the present. A nation that "keeps" its elderly citizens well believes in itself, in its future. A society that exploits its pensioners and gives them only enough to survive on has given up its future, it radiates an image that it is incapable of progress.

I am convinced that the pensioners' standard of living should be gradually improved or at least stabilised even to the disadvantage of the active working generations. It has a favourable effect on the economy from two aspects. First of all pensioners are also consumers, if they have more money, they increase demands by spending, and as there are a lot of pensioners, they represent a more significant item for the economy than state orders. The second aspect concerns the future of the economy, because the existence of a layer of pensioners living in fair circumstances represents a pulling force, it is a part of the national capital. Money spent on pensioners is an investment in the future.

The improvement of pensioners' income situation basically determines healthcare too, as within society it is the elderly who spend the most on hospital treatment and medicine. Consequently a pension reform in itself could revolutionise healthcare. Presently the elderly are complaining that they cannot pay high medicine prices. They should be given more money for medicine, and it will turn out immediately what it is worth investing in within healthcare.

Social demands should be presented rather than modelled. Society is in a bargaining position with individuals and not with its institutes.

## Breakout points

*“I didn't come into politics to change the Labour Party.  
I came into politics to change the country.”*

*(Tony Blair)*

In the interest of advancing economic-social development Hungary must position itself as soon as possible. We must judge our possibilities, facilities and abilities. First of all we must determine the results achieved to date, because this would be the starting point; it will show us the fields where immediate changes must be made and it will show us what we can keep or develop. We must also see clearly what people think about us in neighbouring countries and what sort image the world has of the Hungarian nation.

Our country is ill fated because of its geographical position. Our accession to the European Union did not change our border situation in the strategic sense. During the Turkish occupation Hungary was the last bastion along the border of the Islamic expansion to protect Christianity. Before 1990 we were on the geographical border of the socialist block. The situation is the same now, turned around: we are on the eastern and southern border of the European Union. It is in our elementary interest to get out of this border position. It can only be reached, if the European Union expands in both directions: taking on Romania and Bulgaria in the first phase, and later on, after the accession of Croatia, Serbia and maybe the Ukraine, from the south-east at last we will be positioned in Central Europe. The inconveniences deriving from our border position can be eliminated by undertaking a significant role in the expansion of the European Union. It is important for Hungary also because outside the Union there are significant Hungarian minorities only in the countries mentioned above.

If the above countries also join the European Union, the barriers will be lifted on the borders, and it will become easier to keep contact between Hungarians living in the motherland and in the neighbouring regions. We will also have to open up towards the nations living in the neighbourhood; an efficient method for this may be learning languages. It is not enough to speak English, German or French, it is just as important to learn Slovakian, Serbian, Romanian or Ukrainian. For example, the members of the Habsburg family learnt five-six languages without any special difficulty, including the languages of the small nations that were parts of the former empire. I think it is a nuisance that it takes half a day in state offices to find an employee who speaks Romanian, for example. I believe that the Hungarian nation is able to do this: as opposed to other opinions I do not think that our nation is either adoptive or exclusive, I find it flexible.

Another advantage of Hungary belonging to the European Union is that at last it is not the state that determines who or what a nation is. As a result of the freedom of movement and employment everybody can choose where they belong. For example, only a few people know that the citizens of the European Union can stand for local authority election in their chosen country. For example, if a German citizen who lives and works in Hungary wants to get in the representative body of a settlement, whether he/she gets in only depends on what the voters want, because there are no legal objections to it at all. If he/she thinks that he/she is a part of

the nation and wants to take part in local political life, then he/she can do it freely. It is an old practice in sports, and not only in the case of citizens from the European Union.

We are right to be proud of being Hungarian, but in connection with this we must never forget that our pride can only and exclusively be based on accomplishment. It is only our results that can classify our country for ourselves and abroad. From this aspect for a long time we have not been able to present any results. Last time the world acknowledged our accomplishment was in 1989 when the Austrian-Hungarian border was opened. Since then we have not been able to achieve anything special; no outstanding results we could be proud of. In fact as compared to ourselves we even fell back. During the years of the change of political regime Hungary was a model country in the region, if the European Union had been expanded on the basis of merits, Hungary would have been the first one to accede. (It is another question that in the end Brussels decided to let 10 countries accede at the same time.)

I am not for senseless and aimless self-reproach, so I would rather define the greatest obstructions to national accomplishment. If we come over these obstructions, we can get to the breakout points from where we can achieve results.

I find that one of the greatest obstructions standing in the way of national accomplishment is that people are soil-bound. Within the country there is hardly any labour force movement: if the only firm in a given town closes down, generally the dismissed employees do not move to another settlement to look for work, because they are bound to their soil by the property they own. Even if there were working possibilities for them in another region, the high costs of living, buying or renting a place, do not make moving somewhere else an attractive prospect. As long as there is no cheap accommodation to rent, no flexible response to market changes can be expected from the labour force.

In order to promote the mobility of the labour force the housing market must be changed radically. Another reason for this is that today in Hungary it is very expensive to buy or rent places. Buying a flat or a house is not a tool for people, but an aim in life. Many regard it nearly as a luxury to have their own place. As soon as possible a housing program should be started from which Hungarian citizens would be able to buy their own flats or houses incomparably cheaper than before.

The rented accommodation program I named Mobility would be based on domestic and foreign private investors. At the same time the state could grant significant allowances exclusively for these types of building constructions. I find the Orbán government's housing program shameful, because it supported those who could present an appropriate self-financed share: as a result of this it was those again who were better off that made a good deal, many of them could buy a second or third property in this way, which they could rent out then for a lot of money. The most outrageous thing about it was that those who did not have enough to finance their property purchase from their own resources were made to pay for the program.

The great majority of residential property to be built in the framework of the Mobility rented accommodation program would be constructed to suit the demands of families of four members: the apartments would consist of a living room, three bedrooms, a bathroom, toilet, kitchen and dining room. The current rental charge could not be more than half of the current minimum wage. I think it would be a reasonable price, and the present building technologies make it possible to build such cheap apartments.

Hungarian entrepreneurs could also be partners in this, and I also heard about Swedish and Canadian companies that would be ready to take part in a program like this any time. If they find it worth trying even at this price, then the plan is feasible. Obviously the energy costs in these cheap rented apartments should also be low, no more than the other half of the minimum wage. State allowances, favourable interest would only and exclusively be granted to building companies that take part in the realisation of the Mobility rented accommodation program.

In connection with flexible movement within the country we must also mention the problem of the differences between towns/cities and the countryside. Moving from a town to the countryside will only become a really attractive alternative, when the social services are the same everywhere. In connection with this certain false beliefs generally asserted by those who live in the countryside must be resolved. For example, many people complain that often children of school age must travel even as much as 30 minutes to get to school. Well, in Budapest it is not unusual for children to jounce along even longer than this via various means of mass transport; not to mention the fact that there are more sources of danger, too.

Not all critical remarks are fairly made, but steps must be taken where there are conspicuous differences that put rural areas at a significant disadvantage, lowering the quality of life of the inhabitants living there. For example, it must be achieved as soon as possible that everywhere in the country, in Budapest and in remote rural areas, ambulances get to a given address within a maximum of 15 minutes. I do not think this is so difficult; it is only a question of organisation.

It is also important to make it possible for provincial settlements to join the world of information technology and communication. Internet access should be provided everywhere, as it is now natural with telephones. Having access to the Internet is one of the most important means of reducing differences between the countryside and towns. Obviously appropriate telecommunication concessions must be made for the developments, state incentives and lots of attention is needed. The same stands for other fields of life: before 2010 all workplaces, educational institutes and homes – in the latter case only those that require it – must have Internet access.

As for now the possibilities provided by the Internet are incomprehensible, but it is evident that from the aspect of helping the provinces catch up with the cities it opens up great prospects. It is enough to mention that the further training of those who live in the most isolated small settlements can have a new sense not experienced before.

According to the criteria determined by the European Union 96 percent of the territory of our continent is considered as being rural. In the case of Hungary it means that city life is represented by our big cities (Budapest, Debrecen, Győr, Miskolc, Pécs and Szeged) and by the county towns and the area surrounding for 10 km. All other areas having no organic connection with the cities and towns mentioned above belong to the provinces.

The infrastructure of our big cities is more or less of a European standard now, at the same time there is a huge difference as compared to settlements with less than two thousand inhabitants. We can only talk about progress and reviving villages, if the infrastructure, first of all transport, becomes comparable with that of the big cities. It is intolerable that while in Budapest people can travel with a bus pass in an area of 20 kilometres, in the provinces it is more expensive and more difficult to travel even to the neighbouring village closer than 20 kilometres by public transport.

There is a process observed in Hungary decades ago and still going on that intellectuals instinctively move to the big cities. This situation could be turned round by developing the infrastructure of small settlements, but before that civil social initiatives should be used to replace the missing layer of intellectuals.

Another great hindrance in the way of developing Hungarian accomplishments is our very complicated, nearly incomprehensible legal environment. It takes a very clever person or even lawyer to understand it. Legal acts should be made simpler and stricter at the same time. The state should require as little as possible of the citizens in a comprehensible way, and it should consistently make sure that its requirements are fulfilled, the state should enforce its laws and make the rules of the game clear. All the various smaller and larger loopholes should be eliminated. For all this dramatic deregulation is needed, real legal act annulling legislation.

Another serious obstruction in the way of Hungarian accomplishment is the effective company law. This field should also be drastically changed. The present state cannot be maintained that while in Hungary the registration of a company can take months, in other countries it can be done in a few days.

Another similarly important issue is that income should be really income at last, and then, and only in this case, the incomprehensible system of tax allowances should be done away with. Everything that is simpler and more understandable will be welcome by the inhabitants. When talking about income and taxes we must also deal with the problem of taxing foreigners permanently working in Hungary. The present situation is characterised by that foreign citizens with high wages do not pay their taxes in Hungary, although they earn their money here, and in many cases they push Hungarian citizens out of their position. And on top of all this those who come from the European Union, as a result of EU membership, receive the same health services as Hungarian citizens who pay their taxes here.

It is unfair, this practice must be changed, because in the following years an increasing number of foreigners are expected to come and work in Hungary. If they are employed here for more than three months, they should pay their taxes here, according to the Hungarian law; and if they do not find these conditions favourable, they do not have to work here. Only those should come who undertake to pay their taxes in Hungary.

The obligation to pay welfare charges in proportion with one's income should also mean that the state should tax shares and stock exchange income, and it should introduce tax on bank deposit interest. All in all: taxing capital income cannot be avoided any longer. At first sight it does not seem to be a problem; while it is talked about in general, the idea has a lot of supporters; but only up until the point when it involves somebody else's money. The question of taxing bank deposit interest should only be dealt with once; although it is true that it may result in that a given party loses the elections. However, it must be admitted that not introducing taxes on bank deposit interest is basically against enterprise. It encourages income gained from profiting from one's capital rather than income gained from work.

I repeat it once more: if income is regarded as income at last, then income from capital is also involved in this category. The new accounting system is simple, and if it is realised, it must be strictly enforced. But there is not much chance for this while nearly all Hungarian parliamentary parties serve the world of high finance. Since the change of the political regime

the upper classes, the capitalists have pocketed most of the money. Presently what is good for bankers, the owners of big concerns and farming barons is “good” for Hungary.

Eliminating hindrances that stand in the way of innovation is one of the tasks of outstanding importance in the years to come. Hungarian talent, our innovative abilities are registered on the international market at the price of gold, with only slight exaggeration. It is outrageous that Hungarian innovations are often realised abroad, because the circumstances at home prevent them from becoming successful. In most cases the greatest problem is not the lack of state support. Generally inventors do not ask for more central support, because after realising their invention they have a good share of the financial profit. Administrative hindrances, irregularities in connection with registration should be eliminated as soon as possible.

The performance of the country would increase, if wide-band Internet access were realised everywhere in the country. Luckily significant initiatives have been made in connection with this for years, because the use of the Internet is one of the most efficient means of integrating the countryside in the central economic circulation.

Last but not least I must mention the psychological factors impeding performance: the lack of individual trust and the cult of success, and defeatism. There will be individual trust, and entrepreneurs will trust their success, if they see a free way in front of themselves rather than administrative hindrances. It is a state and social task to strengthen and encourage entrepreneurial spirit. Why wouldn't the realisation of an owners' society be a realistic aim? It only depends on us.

Today success has no news value. The mass media loathes reporting on results. They do not regard it as their task to praise things, and they think that the public is not interested in success stories, only in failures, defeats, blood and scandals. The only possible way to report on economic successes is by publishing them in paid advertisements. This is not at all good; something should be done as soon as possible in the interest of advertising successes, to make results appropriately acknowledged by the public. Apart from complaining, nagging citizens there are also successful, happy citizens in this country. The state should use positive discrimination exploiting its own possibilities, with the help of the state media in order to create a cult of success. It is all right, if people are interested in television programmes like *Kék fény* (the Hungarian version of *Crimewatch*), but as far as I remember another television programme called “*Felkínálok*” (Offer) was just as successful. It undertook to introduce the innovations of Hungarian inventors and the results of successful entrepreneurs. At least the state should support the popularisation of such programmes. Another lack of propaganda is while the public accuses the socialist government of putting a stop to the Széchenyi plan project, the actual situation is completely different. Under the Fidesz government the plan supported three thousand enterprises, while in 2003, during a period of 12 months only, the socialist government supported 4,800 applications. There is no news about this, and it is not only the socialists' fault. It is also a great problem when success is accredited to certain parties.

Fighting off poor-spiritedness is also an essential condition of eliminating the hindrances impeding Hungarian performance. As I mentioned above “small” daily successes are of vital importance for this. What makes it so difficult to adopt laws of vital importance, such as the expropriation act, to facilitate the construction of motorways, or the interest representation jurisdiction due for a long time? They could play the role of a compass making the economic

growth of the country smoother and eliminating bureaucratic hindrances towering in the way of success.

Uncritical, nationalist self-adulation is not the right therapy against defeatism. The Right has acted like this several times in Hungarian history, and the tirades over-estimating ourselves and storming at our neighbouring nations always resulted in a national tragedy.

We must dare to dream, but our dreams should not exceed the limits of our possibilities. We must be proud of our national achievements, because the success of the country can be measured with them, and from this aspect we have results to present. On the more developed part of the European continent, and Hungary is also an organic part of it now, the real concept of a nation always insists on facts: everything else belongs to a misty, romantic world of legends. It is all right if fans wave national flags in stadiums and shout enthusiastic, encouraging slogans, but often they end up offending the opponent, and these manifestations should remain where they belong.

We should undertake our national achievements more confidently. What stops us from printing our national colours on all Hungarian products, including Coca-Cola produced in Hungary? Why not? The water, the sugar, the bubbles, the work invested, the storage, the sales are all Hungarian. The basic material used and the licence fee is only one percent of the whole product.

Our national colours should be printed on all products that are part of the Hungarian performance. The European Union banned Germany from printing "German quality" on their goods, but no one could prevent them from using the German tricolour; and they do use, it is there on the beer cans, too.

The Audi and Suzuki cars produced in Hungary also form a part of our domestic performance. More Hungarian work is invested in them than in Unicum or in Pick salami, for example. Why shouldn't we be proud of these products. They are manufactured here and Hungarian workers produce products of good quality. We should be flexible, we should not exclude such and other similar products manufactured in Hungary from our achievements. How many Hungarians know, for example, that one-fifth of the mobile telephones sold in the world today are made in Hungary. We should also be proud of this, it is also a part of national performance. Many people are ringing the alarm-bell saying that in Hungary and in Budapest foreign investors are building office blocks and plants one after the other. What is wrong with that? These buildings will always stay in the country; they just make us richer. 70 percent of Manhattan is owned by the Japanese, American investors invaded Western Europe in the last few years, but it does not make either Americans or Western Europeans less proud of their national achievements.

Four years ago, as a socialist member of parliament in opposition, I made a proposal in the National Assembly: let us include it in our Constitution that Hungary's official language is Hungarian. My individual proposal was rejected by my own party and the right wing in government, and they did not even put its discussion on the agenda. I have not been able to understand this decision ever since then, because I think that the preservation of our mother language is one of our most significant achievements. Interestingly enough there is a law dealing with the Hungarian language, and it prescribes that in the army orders must be made in Hungarian. As compared to this sooner or later the members of the army, which will soon become a professional army, must communicate mostly in English, as professional Hungarian

soldiers will have to work in the framework of NATO and in the European Union's response force. The Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) succeeded in making a law adopted against foreign language signs to protect the Hungarian language, but it is not much use. Nowhere in the world have they been able to influence standard language with laws. If it were possible, I wonder what words we would use to refer to days and months in our language.

The problem of the middle-class comes up in other contexts, too. As opposed to the right-wing concept referred to as national, in a few sentences I dealt with the fact that the progressive Left undertakes to represent the interests of layers below the upper middle-class. It separates itself from the representatives of capital by concluding an alliance with those who live from their work income and not from their property. The traditional definition according to which the Left only represents the labour class is not valid any more.

People are striving for security and calculability: these two values are also the two slogans of the middle-class. The more members it has, the more people are interested in the stability and the smooth operation of the system. The followers of progress regard the members of the middle-class as their natural allies, because they serve as an example for the lower layers: if you work, if you are successful, you will have a future. In this respect the Left is also the party of the poor, because it always tells them: "Pull yourselves together, join us, we are expecting you!"

The upper middle class is the layer whose living standard and social rank the lower layers can still regard as an aim to reach. The Left can offer credible and feasible programs to achieve this aim. We know well that the further up we go the narrower the so-called social pyramid becomes. The followers of progress must strive for pushing more and more people further up. This movement started from underneath will naturally push everyone else upwards.

I find this striving to move up very important in the fight against poverty. Creating a real possibility to belong to the middle-class can work as a pulling force. At the same time the layers of parasites that are only interested in making their living without working, making use of social benefits cannot be supported at all.

This is a real, continuously returning threat in the welfare society, and the neo-liberal trend is often criticised for it rightfully. In this context, too, individual responsibility is an appropriate tool and compass. The unemployed must prove whether they did their best to get jobs. Collective solidarity can only be asserted, if they failed to find jobs through no fault of their own. At the same time the Left cannot show sympathy for parasites.

This group of questions has an interesting aspect that I experienced in Italy. In the eighties there was a great scandal, because the Italian trade unions completely rejected to deal with the problems of the unemployed. Their argument was that trade unions exclusively represent the interests of employees. This example may seem merciless and even unfair, but it has a message.

Similarly the responsibility of those Hungarian individuals can also be mentioned who become unemployed in the provinces by selling their flat in Budapest, buying a house cheaply somewhere in the provinces and living off the difference as long as it lasts. How can collective solidarity be expected in their case? It would be wiser and more sensible to start a business using the profit gained from the sales transaction rather than live off it. They would

have the right to ask for the community's help, if their business fails, because then they could say that at least they tried to make a living from their own resources.

Talking about Hungarian unemployment I find it important to point out that the rate of unemployment could be much lower, if the Hungarian labour force were more mobile. In connection with being soil-bound I have already mentioned that if Hungarian workers were provided with cheap apartments to rent, they would be more flexible in changing their place of residence.

There is significant disproportion in the different regions in respect of work opportunities. In some counties it is difficult to find people to employ, while in other places it is impossible to find a job. These differences could be eliminated by starting collective rented apartment investments as soon as possible to encourage the mobility of families. If we fail to do that, the redundant Slovakian labour force will appear in Northern Hungary before the domestic labour force.

We cannot avoid facing the Roma issue either. A good reason for this is that as a result of the expansion, the European Union will also face this question. We avoid the real problem, when we deal with the Hungarian situation of the Roma simply as a question of discrimination.

Obviously our starting point must be that everyone is equal under the law, and as a result of this all Hungarian citizens can claim equal rights. At the same time we must not forget about the fact that in a cultural sense the Roma represent a different form of attitude to the members of European societies in general. These differences are not like the ones in South-Tyrol where the only question is whether people regard themselves as Italian or Austrian but in a cultural sense they have more or less the same roots. In the case of the Roma there is a much greater difference with respect to the people amongst whom they live.

The "polite" word for the efforts made to assimilate the Roma is integration, and generally those who are concerned do not really like this idea. And it is only really for the purpose of hushing up problems. The reluctance of the Roma is understandable, because their internal collective rules are significantly different, and they have persisted in keeping them for a long time. They are very significantly different, both in a positive and negative sense, even if sometimes we tend to disregard this fact.

In Europe the issue of the Muslims is similar to the Roma issue, as well as the radically different social norms of ethnic minorities in some areas. Earlier on the inhabitants of the islands belonging to Italy, for example, the Sardinians or the Sicilians, did not want to assimilate to the culture of the larger ethnic group.

It is not easy to solve the Roma problem and there is not much chance of progress in the short term as long as they cannot interpret our moral and legal system with respect to themselves. The dialogue with the leaders of the Roma communities must be made much more organised and persistent than it has been before. Instead of the integration efforts made so far the ways of living beside each other with tolerance must be found.

The time has come to take into consideration the question of cultural autonomy granted to the Roma. They should be given the possibility to choose the community they intend to belong to voluntarily, and they should decide whether they regard themselves Roma or not. If they want to live in the Roma way, they should be granted all the rights involved in cultural autonomy:

first of all their own school system established on the basis of discussions held with them. If various churches and nationalities can have their own schools, why could not they be given this possibility too? American Indians have also been granted many rights only relating to them.

In special cases the Roma autonomy could also be organised on a regional basis, especially in settlements where they are in a great majority. It is only a question of definition, in which internal citizenship concepts could also be mentioned, and within this it could be determined who is Roma. For example, inside the European Union we are all citizens of the EU, but apart from that there are also individual national commitments too.

I find it much more dangerous when the differences are ignored, or when others determine who is a Roma and who is not. Let them decide for themselves what kind of special expectations they have from their autonomy or what customs they expect to be respected. We have Italian and Indian restaurants, so we may just as well have Roma restaurants.

Cultural autonomy is essential, because in a majority cultural environment different cultures unavoidably get damaged, they are suppressed, and they have a little chance of being equal. We must dare to face the differences, the majority can also profit from letting minorities develop. The Roma have proved their talents in numerous professions and arts. If necessary, there should be more Roma primary and secondary schools, universities or even cultural centres available for everybody.

Roma who do not want to make use of the possibilities of cultural autonomy cannot be forced to belong to a community they do not want to belong to. There are significant differences even between the Roma themselves, the possibility of different ethnic groups organising themselves must also be provided.

We must not be afraid of facing facts: the present situation of mangle-mangling, hushing up problems leads to segregation much more than clearly defining the existing differences. It is not obligatory to like each other, but the existence of other cultures must be respected, and their self-realisation must be supported by creating cultural autonomies.

There are also differences between Hungarians and Slovaks, not only between Hungarians and Roma. Stealing a hen is punished differently in Bratislava and in Budapest. Consequently hen theft committed by a Roma and a Hungarian could also be judged differently. I even find it feasible that a person who regards himself/herself as a Roma be judged by a Roma court, and we could also have a Roma prison. (In criminal law there is discrimination, even if it is unsaid.)

The Roma should also have a right to administration in the Roma languages. All in all: the Roma living in Hungary should be provided with all the rights we require for Hungarians living beyond the borders of Hungary.

## Too late, too early

*“Out of intense complexities  
intense simplicities emerge.”*

*Winston Churchill*

At the dawn of the change of the political regime we thought that Hungary's accession to the European Union would be a simpler, a faster process. At that time, of the former communist countries that chose the democratic form of government, Hungary was a leader both with respect to the rate and depth of its socioeconomic transformation. It did not seem just a daydream that in the first round of the expansion process, in the middle of the nineties, we could become a member state of the European Union.

This was not what really happened. As compared to the first expectations our accession on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 happened too late. It was also too late psychologically, because fourteen years after the change of political regime, after so many disappointments Hungary was not as overjoyed at accession to the democratic European family as it should or could have been.

But we did not have much say in the accession affairs. It was decided in Brussels that, technically, it was much simpler for the 15 member states and also much cheaper to let ten states accede at the same time. They were aware of the fact that there were significant differences between the countries waiting to accede, and that they must turn a blind eye to numerous deficiencies and unfulfilled prescriptions.

If we compare the Hungarian economic indicators with the achievements expected in the European Union, then it can be said that our accession took place too early. There is no point in crying over it, we must look ahead, and before 2010, the year when the Euro will be introduced in Hungary, we must organise ourselves and gradually prepare Hungarian society for new challenges.

Hungary and the Hungarian people have always considered themselves as representatives of European mentality. Hungary's thousand-year-old existence as a state, our national characteristics have contributed a new shade to the multicoloured picture of our continent for centuries, with varying intensity. On the basis of Greek mythology Europe is often compared to a beautiful woman: exuberant, multicoloured, indecisive, gentle, cultured, receptive, reactive, slow, considerate, moody, talkative, lovely, neat, orderly – like an imaginary, beautiful goddess with contradictory human characteristics. But she can also be brutal, merciless and depressed – two terrible wars demonstrate this. Nearly all the essential features of the modern world, its discovery, and even the creation of the United States are due to our continent. At the same time the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also the history of Europe coming into conflict with herself. She might not have been able to stand on her own feet again without external help. One of the greatest lessons the peoples of Europe learnt in the last century is that conflicts created on this continent may set the whole world on fire.

The idea of the European Union created with the silent approval of the United States was originally born to support French-German reconciliation. In the course of the expansion

process this problem lost its significance, however, as further states acceded to the Union, the number of problems to be solved increased.

We must admit that we have a slight tendency to identify the European character with cultural superiority. When we talk about the European solution, for us it means being sporting. We, Europeans are not much bothered that in other parts of the world they have completely different adjectives and characteristics in mind when they talk about us.

Even today one of the greatest obstructions to the European character, progress in the ideal sense is nationalism, which still basically determines our continent. There are hardly any nations in Europe in the language of which there is no abusive expression relating to the neighbouring country. It would be tragicomic, if people were made to face the fact that the derogative adjectives they use to describe the people of a neighbouring nation are also used by that nation to describe them in nearly exactly the same way. From this aspect it is a good thing that relatively few of them speak each other's language.

On our continent there are still a great number of ethnic and language-related separation lines. Often the differences end in armed conflicts: the Irish versus the British, the Basques versus the Spanish, and then I have not mentioned the South Slavic conflicts that exploded in former Yugoslavia. Interestingly enough in the present era, Europe is much more tolerant with respect to religious leaning than in connection with linguistic-ethnic differences.

In the East for a few decades after World War II, the answer given to the raging nationalism of the preceding era was the internationalism dictated by the Soviet Union. It did not help much, because it was carried out in the form of violent relocations, and the dark ghost of nationalism was always there hiding behind the scenes. Soon after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, the region echoed with well-known Eastern European nationalistic slogans. In Western Europe the divided continent strengthened the feeling of solidarity, but since the reunion national selfishness has been revived there, too.

However, "thanks" to the multinational companies, in the field of the economy there are very strong links between the countries of Europe. The various societies started out in a direction just the opposite to this, the number of those who believe in national isolation is increasing, but business is a great power and its laws dictate. Europe hates multinational companies in the same way as it rejects all uniform things: We both love and hate McDonald's restaurants at the same time. However, the present state, where economic integration is much more developed than political integration, cannot be maintained much longer. A common constitution approved by all participants is an essential condition of strengthening political integration. The Hungarian government and the political elite also have a responsible role in this process, also because in Hungary people do not have the slightest idea about the whole thing.

National constitutions – where such a thing exists at all, because, for example, the United Kingdom has no written constitution – are not overwritten by the European Constitution, it does not represent a superior order. It is not even a constitution, it is only a colloquial term for it, its official name is Constitutional Treaty. It was worded in a laborious, difficult style, it is not likely that the average European citizen could understand it after reading it once, and there is an even smaller chance of it being accepted in a referendum. The text of the treaty is a true picture of the slow, bureaucratic administration in Brussels pondering on insignificant details.

From the very beginning the Constitutional Treaty should have been worded taking into consideration the decisive fact that a document should only be put before the people that is certain to be accepted at a referendum held in any member state. In that case, a simple text would have been worded that is easy to understand and love.

The operation of the European Parliament and all European institutes in general should be made simpler. An enormous number of minor details of the common decision-making mechanism should be disregarded for the time being, and special attention should be given to the really important ones.

In the near future the European Union, which now has 25 members, should solve three questions as soon as possible. I think that the most important question is introducing the Euro in more member states. Secondly, a simple, comprehensible Constitution worded on the basis of the aspects mentioned above should be accepted in all member states strictly by referendum. In the United States too, the individual states could only accede to the federation after accepting the Constitution. Before the expansion of 2004 the newly joining states stipulated that the former fifteen member states would have to wait for the new ones before approving the Constitutional Treaty.

Finally, a common European response force should be put together. This would form one of the pillars of NATO beside the United States and the armies outside the organisation, such as the Russian army. By putting together a professional army Hungary took a significant step in the interest of accomplishing the conditions relating to establishing a response force. (The way the neutral states of the EU approach the question of this legion is a separate issue. They can justly object to all steps taken in this field that endanger their neutrality. It is also an important question as to how much they are justified in maintaining their neutrality beside EU membership.)

These three tasks should be performed as soon as possible, and until then all other decisions should be delayed. If an agreement is achieved regarding the basic pillars, all other decisions can be made on the basis of this, and it would turn out immediately that Brussels can operate as a much more efficient organisation. The general public of the member states would also appreciate it, fewer people would criticise the Eurocrats for being paid for attending the Circumlocution Office. Common decisions and strong will is needed to do all this. Conflicts even with certain governments must be undertaken. If no progress is made in respect of these three questions in the foreseeable future, we must give up the idea of a real European Union for a long time.

It is a cliché, but it is worth repeating that the United States was able to become great due to their common language and common currency, basically speaking: the common language of money. As for a common language presently Europe hopelessly hangs behind America. There are just as many disadvantages as advantages to our continent's cultural and linguistic variety. Several generations will grow up before the knowledge of foreign languages stops hindering communication between different ethnic groups. Before that the best solution is to learn as many foreign languages as possible, at least at a basic level, following good old Habsburg traditions.

Maybe the introduction of a common currency will be easier, but presently the countries that already use the common currency are in the minority among the 25 member states. However, in 2010 we can expect a significant change in this field, too, as according to the present plans

20 member states will belong to the Euro zone. At the same time the EU will have more members, too.

And we are talking about the prominent year of 2010 again, and this time in a very special context, because it can be concluded from the above that the Union will really engage a higher gear from this year. This dynamism will probably affect the individual member states, including Hungary.

It will take a long time for Hungarian citizens, or I may as well say the citizens of any member state, to be able to make a distinction between affairs relating to domestic legislation and European legislation. All countries must comply with the basic principles and rules. Consequently the government cannot be called to account for anything that is put on the common table. It does not at all mean the impairment of national sovereignty, on the contrary: it serves the common interests of all member states. It is like the regulations nailed on the wall in a block of flats: it determines rules for everybody's benefit, rules the observation of which is in the interest of all the residents.

Obviously in the long term the aim is to realise the sovereignty of the European Community. (In the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, also, the financial, foreign and military affairs were under joint control.) The first step could be to establish a common army, which may have an important role, for example, in the fight against terrorism. It is in the EU's vital interest to represent a common standpoint in connection with handling conflicts flaring up in various parts of the world. The national interests of the member states are also represented by harmonised decisions in the most efficient way. When all this is realised, Henry Kissinger's witty remark will become irrelevant, when he asked laughing: "Whom should I call when I want to speak to Europe? Give me a name and address."

Another positive manifestation of common sovereignty affecting average people more is, for example, that if we get in trouble anywhere in the world, then we can turn to the consulate of any EU member state for help.

The member states must also be made aware of the fact that the aim of the European Union is no less than becoming the leading economic power of the world. It is not at all impossible to attain, but I think it would be a mistake to compare the EU's accomplishment to its competitors all the time. As in connection with the efficiency of the Hungarian economy, I also found it important to underline that the aims should always be determined and realised in relation to our own demands, I think that the same logic is valid in relation to Europe.

Just think about it: the EU is the largest economic zone on Earth. It represents a solvent, organised, huge market, which is a real competitor to the United States. No wonder that the USA, which used to be very helpful when the EU was established, and demonstrated its readiness to provide support all the time, retreated into the background as years passed. First they just said that the European Union should stand on its own feet and they should not count on active help, similar to the role of American capital after World War II. Later on it became obvious that it was a situation of sour grapes, and America saw the old continent as a competitor.

No wonder that the United States encouraged the decision on the latest explosion-like expansion so much, and they are the ones who are pushing the acceptance of Turkey the most. It is obvious that the wider, the more various and the more divided the EU is, the less efficient

it can operate, and the smaller the chance is of it becoming a federation similar to the USA in the short or medium term. It was not easy to co-ordinate 15 member states, just imagine what it will be like to do this with 25 member states, and later on when even more countries accede. Obviously Brussels was and is aware of the real interests behind America's good intentions, but despite all this it undertook the expansion.

From the aspect of our continent, it would have tragic consequences, if the former communist countries got into an irreparably unfavourable economic situation. However difficult it seems to make so divergent and different nations have a common intention, they must give it a try. Integration will really slow down, there will be less money for cohesion support, it will take longer for the less developed countries to catch up, but it will still be better for the EU than prolonging expansion.

It is a different question that the new states will be justified to protest against the only gradual introduction of benefits that were automatically granted to the countries acceding earlier. When Greece, Spain and Portugal acceded, they received enormous amounts of aid, no wonder that within the space of just a decade they went through an enormous economic transformation.

It is the irony of fate that these countries were among the first ones to complain in the course of the latest expansion, and they acted against supporting the newly acceding countries. So far they saw the EU as a welfare state, but now the earlier system cannot be financed any more on the basis of the old method. Both individuals and countries must face individual responsibility. If they have done this, and they still need help, only then can they profit from collective solidarity.

The European Union's other great objective is the realisation of full employment. According to the community's definition it is realised by 70% employment of men and 60% employment of women able to work.

In Brussels the principle of decision-making is the necessity to conclude an agreement. We experienced it during the negotiations preparing our accession, as the expansion was conducted on the basis of the necessity of concluding an agreement. A political operation system based on reaching a consensus is also the basic guarantee of good government. It is essential to reach a consensus in questions of content, while in technical matters voting is becoming widely used.

Common decisions are unappealable by national parliaments, which, according to Euro-sceptics, is against democratic principles. There are issues in all democratically operating countries in which no referendum can be held. In Hungary, for example, taxation is such an issue. The right proportions must be found in the decision-making mechanism; to see in which questions it is essential to assert democratic mechanisms and in which questions it is not. Obviously a strictly democratic decision must be made regarding these questions.

European democracies are varied, and in respect of parliamentary government there are significant differences between them. In certain member states it is compulsory for each citizen to vote at the national elections. For example, in Belgium people who do not want to vote are fined. From 2010 compulsory voting should also be introduced in Hungary, I do not think that this proposal would justify any constitutional worries. It is compulsory for the members of parliament to take part in the work of the national assembly, they are penalised

for being absent, even though in a mild form. It can also be expected of those who are entitled to vote to regard it as their moral obligation to take part in decisions affecting their own lives at least indirectly.

Politics and professional politicians bear an enormous responsibility for creating a comprehensible, simple and understandable system of operation. My favourite anecdote is that some MPs from different nations are ardently trying to convince each other how excellent their own electoral system is, and they give an extended explanation about it. The English MP does not describe his own country's system, he simply says that it is the best. The others laugh at him and ask him why he does not want to justify his statement. The Englishman just lets off a remark offhandedly: the English system is so simple that everybody understands it.

Democracy fulfils its mission, when everybody understands its principles of operation. In today's complicated world it is essential to try and define problems in the simplest possible way. If we fail to do so, democracy will very soon lose the ground from under its feet. The computer, which seems to be the most difficult machine in modern technology, works as the simplest thing in the world. All questions asked can be answered by saying yes or no.

One of the most precious values of Europeanism is its variety. At the same time it is also its greatest challenge. While preserving this variety our legal relations should be simplified as much as possible. I would like to mention a Hungarian analogy again: in Europe drastic deregulation is needed, the lowest common denominators need to be found. Generally dynamically developing economies have a simple system of taxation. In Europe there is complete chaos, citizens have to face a whole range of legal interpretations. In America it is very simple: did you pay taxes? Yes or no? If the answer is no, then you are a tax evader. In Europe it is also varied, just like the culture. Tax evasion is difficult to prove. Obviously, if the system were simpler and more comprehensible, less time and energy would have to be invested in uncovering fraud.

In general Europeans consider themselves to be tolerant, but mostly it is just a dream. Unfortunately nationalism has again appeared on the continent, and in the short term it will become more serious as a result of the EU expansion and increasing immigration. According to the extreme right-wing tolerance is nothing else but the liberals' support of gayness. I do not find this simplified statement exemplary. According to the liberal approach tolerance means respecting those who are different, while according to the progressive left-wing interpretation it means acceptance of difference.

Tolerance may be an efficient remedy for nationalism: before they form their opinion, they should try and find information about what they want to criticise. The acceptance of difference excludes prejudiced rejection.

In their program elaborated before the European elections the representatives of the European left-wing parties laid down that no compromise whatsoever can be accepted with the extreme right wing. It seems to contradict the standpoint expecting a tolerant attitude that no one can be segregated. No one except for extremists. One of the great challenges of our European nature is whether we can eliminate right-wing and left-wing extremists. It will definitely not result in us being positioned in the middle in the field of politics.

At the European parliamentary elections held in June 2004 nearly all parties in government, right-wing and left-wing, suffered a serious loss. The political forces in opposition also lost,

because the number of people who voted was lower than ever before. It seems that Europe still has not been able to digest this double failure.

The political elite of Brussels and the individual member states defy all innovations as a reflex action, they have no picture of the future, they lack dynamism. It seems as if they do not understand what is going on around them, as if something was obscuring the view from their ivory tower. At the same time the message from European citizens is very clear: they are fed up with the political elite, because they do not deal with affairs that affect people's everyday lives. The present practice is completely rejected. It seems that no one can hear this message in Brussels and in the capital cities of Europe.

At last the political elite should stop dragging their heels on internal affairs; for years they have been unable to define long-term concepts regarding even the simplest issues. In the following period the followers of progress should demonstrate in Brussels that the main point of the EU is how it relates to the challenges of the outside world. What are these challenges? The United States, terrorism, globalisation, the changing of the climate, immigration in the modern age. The European Union should take a stand with respect to these challenges very soon, and it should inform its citizens about it in a way that can be understood.

In connection with external problems it is much easier to find a common platform than in respect of internal affairs, because most of these require a national response.

The European political elite is not moving, they have been talking about the same thing for years. They are convinced that in election after election the same circle of politicians get to Brussels, so the administration of affairs will remain in their hands. Those who come up with new ideas are excluded by their own parties from the circle of electable representatives.

The political elite is in big trouble both in Brussels and in Europe, including Hungary. They have a very narrow space within which they can move. The possibilities of governments are restricted by thousands of obstructions; they cannot step over their own shadows. Because of these restrictions even the great parliamentary parties cannot come up with real alternatives with respect to each other; most of the time they just steal each other's ideas. Electors are starting to find it difficult to make a distinction between the parties on the left and on the right.

Under such circumstances demagogues temporarily play a more significant role, it could be seen on the occasion of the European elections. Generally populists cover their lack of skills by speaking out loudly and asserting unrealistic requirements. Some of electors do listen to these people, because they seem to be saying new things unlike the monotony of the boring slogans of the political elite in power heard a thousand times over and over again.

Sooner or later demagogues will disappoint people too, I am quite sure. Their arguments are dominated by negative rejections, and they cannot give answers; they cannot answer the problems of economic development, the changing of the climate, immigration or European unity.

All the progressive left can do is choose the path of truth as opposed to demagogy. Society must be faced with the real problems, even if it is a painful process in the short term, even if we become less popular because of it. For example, we must answer the questions regarding the relationship between capital and society, people and the environment and questions in

connection with internal social problems, such as unemployment, immigrants, the sexes, religion, etc.

The followers of progress have no other choice but to deal with things that really concern people: help them to relieve their doubts, speak to them in a human voice, listen to their complaints; to make politics humane; to make things that seem complicated simpler; to restore people's confidence in politics. It will not be easy, we are facing a really long march.

The European Union needs more courage to convince the citizens of its member states of the importance of the community. We, Hungarians also need more courage, even if some people think it is only a play put on for special effect. Symbolic acts are needed, often such steps mean more than careful, empty philosophising.

Hungary could close its guard cabins along the borders of the Union; unilaterally, not mutually, because no legal act obliges us to maintain them. The forces freed on the Austrian, Slovakian and Slovenian borders could be regrouped to the Schengen borders, and as a result of this stricter control complying with the expectations of the European Union could be installed on the Ukrainian, Romanian, Serbian and Croatian borders.

Finally it must also be mentioned that soon after the former European Union of fifteen members becomes friendly with the ten new member states, they are starting to talk about the accession of Romania and Bulgaria. In connection with this the problem of Turkey should be settled as soon as possible: a decision must be made, whatever the answer is. It is necessary, because if the answer is yes, the question will rightfully arise: what will happen to the states of the Caucasian and Mediterranean region, especially North-Africa, that regard themselves as parts of European culture? And then we have not taken Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia into consideration.

A few more generations will have to do their best before these ambitious ideas can become reality.

## Faith and church

(Tony Blair)

Having a religious faith and being progressive do not exclude each other. I venture even further: contrasting faith with the Left is wrong. Those who think that religious people or religion belong to the right side of political life serve very graspable party interests.

Norberto Bobbio, Italian left-wing political scientist mentions innumerable historical examples of connections between faith and the revolutionary Left: the ancient Christians announced equality with slaves, and after Christianity had become institutional many rebellions were started against the classes in power based on religious doctrines. Also, a good number of former revolutionaries were church dignitaries: in the history of rebellious movements it was the exception, if a movement lacked in religious ideas or personalities.

The same stands for our era too. In Latin America the representatives of the Catholic church, mainly local priests in close relationship with the poor, played a significant role in left-wing revolutionary movements after World War II, many of them even died a modern martyr's death. The fact itself that the Christian socialist movement appeared shows that the left wing does not exclude religion. More precisely: if we take Christian ideals into consideration, it should be regarded as abnormal, antihuman when the church as an institute takes a stand for a suppressive political power. History has a lot of examples of this, I will mention some later on.

Everybody knows that today left-wing ideas are often contrasted with religion, because in its Stalinist, communist dead-end type realisation it destroyed all the church's forms of manifestation by fire and sword. In the former Soviet Union and in the countries it controlled religion and its representatives were regarded as mortal enemies. It is a different question that since communism failed democratic Russia and most of the former communist countries are trying to overachieve as if they were making amends, and they go from one extreme to the other. In order to do penance for the sins committed against churches and religious people now they are putting their national church on a pedestal, which is unusual everywhere else in the world. At the inauguration ceremony of a Russian president the patriarch of all Russians is at least as essential an accessory, as the Bible in the United States or the national flag in the European democratic countries.

From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the so-called revolutionary wing of the Left committed unforgivable sins against churches and religious people. Although it is true that the mass killings resembling the spirituality of medieval religious wars were not only aimed against them. All the institutes and people that/who were not willing to follow the Stalinist ideas were oppressed. However, Stalinist-type socialism, which was not progressive and not left-wing, was regarded as left-wing because of its motives and references. Although it was condemned by international social democracy and often even by the disappointed Russian revolutionaries themselves, it did not change the way it was judged at all.

We must make all this heritage of the dead-end communist past clear, even if we do not feel any responsibility for the sins mentioned above, not to mention common spiritual motives.

The social democratic Left, the followers of progress had nothing at all to do with the distorted and tragic manifestations.

Once balances and proportions have such a central place in our way of thinking, we must also mention the historical sins of the churches; even though we know that the anti-religious sins of communism and no less importantly fascism/nazism of the recent past live more vividly in the mind of the present generations than the historical sins committed by the churches, especially those committed by the Christian church against their own followers, the followers of other faiths and different ethnic groups.

Who can count how many massacres, bloody wars were declared in the sacred name of God? Let us remember the crusades against the followers of other religions as well as the merciless attacks against the Cathars, Albigenses and Hussites, who regarded themselves as Christians but were declared as heretics by the Christian Church. Or let us mention the religious wars following the Great Schism, which bled the peoples of Europe for two centuries, while the Islamic Turkish armies were besieging the walls of Vienna. After the great geographical discoveries the representatives of the Christian churches, especially the Jesuits were excellent at the complete extermination of various native peoples and their cultures. In their eagerness to convert people they destroyed nearly all the relics of civilisation and culture, the common heritage of human kind. The sins of Christian inspiration committed against Judaism are still regarded as howling injustices; the pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to Israel is only the start of facing the charges of fratricide.

Let us stop here. The Christian Church and the churches created before or after it are historic churches; due to their thousands or hundreds of years of tradition the list given above could be continued endlessly, but this is not my intention. I do not want to do this, because I believe that merit should also be included in proportion; especially the fact that religion, since people have been defining themselves as conscious creatures, has always held a central, indelible role. It has been a compass helping people to find their way among the seemingly incomprehensible mysteries of the world, a guiding principle supporting them in need, in tragedy, in failure. It gave sense to the indefinable, future in hopeless situations, life after death.

Faith, religion is as old as mankind, and maybe we will never find out how it was first defined consciously. However much people misused it and manipulated with its name and in its name, most of them never gave up their beliefs. We know now. Faith, religion did not die, although this is what the great majority of philosophers dazzled by the omnipotence of sciences thought after the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today we are witnessing the revival of faith. One of its graspable manifestations can be observed in our immediate environment, in the former socialist countries. After four decades of oppression, persecution and compromise it can be regarded as natural, and although it is very likely that the enthusiasm for religion and the church will become less intensive after a while, it will more or less become part of the general European picture. It is important to point out that, very wisely, the Catholic Church dealt with the case of the national churches and dignities who were mostly compelled to co-operate with the suppressing power during the decades of communism “within its own doors”. They did not trumpet the names of the stray sheep abroad, and in most cases they left everybody in their position, they trusted biology, retiring age and in the present case – for understandable reasons – God’s tribunal to solve the

problem. The tendency of the representatives of the church to compromise with the communist regimes in power was explained with special circumstances.

The renaissance of religion can be observed in the Islamic countries more pronouncedly than in the Eastern European region, especially in the strengthening of fundamentalism coupled with terrorism. This increasing tendency can be regarded as a response to the dead-end, aborted modernisation efforts of the Arabic countries. This tendency is strong mostly in regions where only a small part of society is able to answer the challenges of the modern age, and the decaying, impoverished masses have no chance of humane living conditions at all. The deficiencies of the economy and the misery involved in it provide fertile soil for religious fanaticism. Similarly to the proletariat during wild capitalism, the miserable creatures of the undeveloped world also have only their chains to lose. It is true even if we know that a great number of suicide bombers are middle-class, even well to do activists. We must not forget that in the underground movements of the labour movement there were also a lot of high-society youngsters.

It would be interesting to analyse the phenomenon that in the United States there has also been an upward trend in religious life, along the ideas of Christian fundamentalism. Now faith fills an increasingly dominant role even in politics. A significant number of public personalities in America emphasise their religious devotion, they attend the Sunday services of their religion nearly without exception. The Republican Party lays especially great emphasis on having a good relationship with the Evangelist movements, which often tend to favour extreme manifestations. Karl Rove, chief advisor of president Bush says that their re-election cannot be doubted, if the supporters of these movements vote for them. The propaganda machine is continuously emphasising that a joint prayer often precedes the meetings of the President's cabinet. John Kerry, the presidential candidate of the Democrats could not withdraw from religious affairs either; in his speech in Boston when he accepted his candidacy, referring to the sanctimoniousness of the republicans he said: the question is not whose side God takes in political affairs, but that politicians should take God's side.

The strengthening of faith in our modern age is not surprising at all. People feel confused by the acceleration of the flow of information and by all the technological innovations; they cannot find anything to hold on to in the hurricane commotion of change. It is an elementary human desire to strive for security, to be able to find a way among the mountains of phenomena. Politics cannot satisfy this desire any more, it cannot answer people's questions. We may say that politicians themselves have also got lost in the whirl of details, and they have forgotten about that it is an elementary human desire to receive simple answers to great questions concerning human life.

Religion can offer something to hold on to even in this over-complicated, confusing world. It gives explanations comprehensible to the human mind for our ponderings on the creation of the world, the sense of human life and the future. As a good psychiatrist it assures those who are puzzled, and people turning to it can always find consolation.

In its present state politics does not fill this role and will not be able to do so unless it finds its way back to the people. Politics should be made human. One of the great advantages of democracy is politicians or parties that win the most votes carry out their activity according to the voters' intents for a certain period of time, and they are called to account only on the occasion of the next elections. This advantage is also a great disadvantage, because in this way the great majority of the people feel that they have fulfilled their obligation with respect

to politics by voting every four or five years, if they go and vote at all. No direct, everyday channels of democracy have been established through which politicians and voters are able to discuss directly mutually important questions. Political life has become bureaucratic, boring and lost in details, and it does not even make an effort to answer the great basic questions concerning people. It cannot see the wood for the trees, it escapes into professional idling, lets television prophets do the preaching and show the way to people in the mundane jungle.

Interestingly enough the intensification of faith and religious life does not necessarily mean the strengthening of churches. The two do not normally overlap. An increasing number of people exercise their religion outside religious institutes or even against them. There are as many concepts of god as there are people. "My God bless you!" we often say, and we do not even realise how true this nice exclamation is. In one of the writings by Albert Wass, a poor shepherd depicts God as a policeman, because the policeman helped him out when he was in trouble. The distance between God as an old man with a white beard and scientists' picture of God is just as large as between believers and non-believers. The more we know about the world the more we are aware of how much we still do not know: many people say that this mysterious world not yet discovered is God. Conversion exists not only from unbelief to religiousness, but also in the opposite direction.

Many large churches have the same problems as politics. Due to the omnipotence of the hierarchic order and the overabundance of international organisational questions there is less time and energy for looking after the souls of the believers, and this is why in our age we experience small churches and sects springing up like mushrooms. Those who believe in God or regard themselves religious in some form or another do not necessarily exercise their faith within the framework of a church. The prestige of the large churches is also impaired by religious pluralism: an increasing number of people are changing their denomination even within a given religion, and there are also a significant number of conversions from one faith to another.

Religious revival does not weaken progress, as progress regards the free practice of religion as one of the most important rights of people. The followers of progress regard the separation of the state and the church as one of the greatest results in the history of mankind. Faith is the most internal private affair, similarly to unbelief or atheism. In state institutes there should be no crosses or crescent moons, religious symbols should remain within churches, and everybody can decide for themselves whether they want to have them at home or not.

Religion is not a political separating line, people both from the right wing and the left wing can believe in God. Perhaps the followers of progress are bolder to question traditions they find obsolete, they have less taboos. But they never question the right to religion or practise faith, and this is not their aim either. They make a distinction between faith and church.

We must admit that there is a difference between the two. The social control of church institutes is just as important as the control of any other organisations that are not based on religious dogma. Let us see, for example, the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican. During its history of nearly two thousand years it existed as a real state, and it still does: on the one part in actual fact as the sovereign Vatican state, and on the other part as the top organisation of the national churches.

Maybe it is not an exaggeration and definitely not a joke to say that the Vatican was the first and, up till now, the most successful multinational enterprise. What does a really well

functioning, large multinational concern need? It needs centralised control, company identity, consistently used symbols, a logo, co-ordinated words, slogans and a tune. The central intention is driven by the desire to satisfy the customers' demands at a high standard; it adapts itself to national characteristics, it represents huge lobbying power; and it chooses its leaders via a strict selection process: they must fulfil quality expectations to get promoted in the company, mistakes are rare in connection with appointing leaders, the meritorious ones are managed appropriately, and, last but not least, loyalty to the company is strictly required.

Well, it is not an accident that the Vatican, which embodies the Catholic Church, can be regarded as the prototype of multinational concerns. The Vatican with its headquarters inside Rome is the common intent to which the national churches are subordinated in a strict hierarchical order. Those who divert from the official guidelines are excommunicated, in earlier days they were physically destroyed. Of course, not all churches are as centralised and rigid as the Catholic Church, but as in Hungary and its wider environment, in Europe it plays a dominant role, we must deal with it in detail.

Another reason for dealing with it is that although it is not a member of the European Union, as an observer it carries out intensive lobbying in various institutions of the European Union. One of the keen debates in connection with the European Constitutional Treaty is also due to Vatican diplomats; the debate was about whether the introductory part should contain mention of our continent's Christian spiritual heritage. It is rather strange: they do not undertake membership, but they use all their influence to interfere with the internal affairs of the European Union.

The main thing is that churches should be treated in the same way as any other social establishments. For example, the question of control is unavoidable; both with respect to financial affairs and internal operation. Churches cannot be small states within the big state. First of all, as it valid in the case of civil organisations that the club members maintain the club, the same stands for churches. After the conclusion of the rightful compensation process only state support should only be granted to church activities that contribute to certain socially significant activities, especially in the field of healthcare and education. At the same time, and it is a very important aspect, they – similarly to civil organisations – should also account for all the money granted to them by the state.

Secondly, church representatives are also fallible; they also make mistakes or commit trespasses. Some of them cause financial damage to their church or to their followers, and especially in the latter case they should not be able to avoid criminal responsibility. In recent years the number of paedophile cases within churches has sorrowfully increased, especially in the Catholic Church. The most distressing thing about it is that in many cases the Vatican and the local episcopates turn a blind eye to these cases, and they even try to hush them up. The sinful priests are removed to other districts where they are able to continue their perverse activity of corrupting youth. Similar scandals broke out not only in the United States; recently the police detected a paedophile network in an Austrian parish. Or we could also mention the case of Father Jankowski in Gdansk: the infamous Polish priest known for his anti-Semitic diatribes was made to retire because of sexual harassment against infants.

In the meantime the Vatican and its procurators are hypocritically castigating mundane sins: they regularly attack sexual relationships between members of the same sex, they curse contraception and despise women's equal rights. At the same time within their own world

they turn a blind eye to scandals, and they regard it as interference with the internal life of the Church, when the public requires them to call the sinning priests to account.

The principle of exercising faith freely is not infringed at all, if society also controls religious institutions. Everyone's religious conviction must be respected, whatever it may be, as well as the lack of such conviction. Faith does not make anyone good or bad. It is an intimate private affair, and if some people do not want to talk about it, then it is not polite to ask them questions, just like in connection with financial affairs. The followers of progress never vilify God, because by doing so they would vilify people.

I do not think it is right when politicians court the favour of churches and compete with each other trying to win religious people by saying pleasant things to them. I do not think that the questions of religion belong to the field of politics anyway. Religious people accept or reject politics on the basis of its acts and not on the basis of eloquent speeches. In the long term I think that sincerity is more efficient, hypocrisy will hit back sooner or later. I do not find it right when churches ask favours from politics, because they may get into a situation where they are exposed, and they lose their creditability in front of their followers the great majority of whom – I am convinced – do not cast their votes on the basis of religious considerations.

Politics is the art of power, and often force is applied when it is exercised. As opposed to this the task of religion is to maintain the tranquillity of the spirit. The two are incompatible: the church that endeavours to take part in politics belies itself; it divides its own followers. The only political task churches can worthily undertake can be working for reconciliation between opposing parties. Hopefully there will be less need for this in the future.

## **Distorted reflections of the pursuits of power**

“Newspapers are unable, seemingly to discriminate  
between a bicycle accident and the collapse of civilisation.”

(George Bernard Shaw)

The years directly preceding and following the change of the political regime will be described on the golden pages of the history of the Hungarian press. Never before had people been in so much expectation of the latest issues of their favourite papers or journals, or broadcasts of their radio or television programmes. In this period the public and journalists were characterised by the same mentality: they were able to talk, write and provide information freely after the suppression of the preceding decades. We all felt a bit dizzy in the ecstasy of the freedom of speech. The copies of newspapers sold and the number of people watching and listening to the electronic media was sky-high.

However, this dynamism diminished after the middle of the nineties. I do not know exactly why, one day press historians may give us the explanation of the process that lead to the adverse press conditions of the present. Obviously, one of the causes was that the public got tired. The euphoria of the first few years was followed by apathy; people did not understand why the abuses that had become public did not have any consequences. All the revealing articles, reports and analyses were in vain. Everything continued in the same way, the economic and political elite shook off the series of scandals like a wet dog water.

On the other side the press also lost the fresh innocence it was characterised by during the change of the political regime. People saw good business in it, and they realised that the organs of the press involved possibilities for influencing or, rather, manipulating. In line with the appearance of businessmen in search of mere financial profit and the forces wanting to assert economic-political interests, the professional respect for journalism started to diminish. While earlier journalists, editors and chief editors had a significant influence on maintaining the basic ideals of their organs and having their professional and moral basic rules observed, as the years passed these aspects were pushed into the background.

Large multinational concerns and western press empires appeared in Hungary, and this also significantly changed the traditions of the Hungarian press. They arrived with prefabricated models: they buy up successful press products, and all they leave unchanged is the name or title. They fill them with all the clichés they think are the tokens of success: if their product was successful in Bucharest, Berlin, Warsaw or Stockholm, then Budapest and Hungary will be no exceptions either. Or if they are, these press products will help them change their tastes and values. Sooner or later there will be no other choice anyway.

Today, the written and electronic press is practically dominated by clichés adopted from more developed countries; and not only in the formal characteristics of newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes, but in their content, too. Anything with a different profile trying to maintain some independence is in most cases either of poor quality, or it can be shown that it represents the economic and party interests of a few without any difficulty.

Creditworthy, objective, independent information is rare to find. A few last enthusiastic representatives of the press are still fighting desperately, but their voice cannot be heard, they do not generate any response, and the greatest problem is that there does not seem to be any demand for such independent journalism in the classical sense.

Party political leaning within the press has also changed significantly as compared to the years around the change of the political regime. While at the beginning of the nineties newspapers sympathising with the Left were evidently more dominant, now the right-wing media seems stronger. I am not weeping for the return of the earlier situation, I do not think that the adverse state of the press at present is due to the fact that slowly and systematically our political opponents are becoming more dominant. (It is a worldwide tendency that right-wing mass communication press forums are gaining ground.) Independently of which party the various organs sympathise with, these disproportionalities are disturbing. Consequently the followers of progress must strive for creating new balances in the field of the press, too.

The press is often referred to as the fourth estate or branch of power. Its participants do have a significant effect on public opinion: they can heat up emotions for or against certain affairs or persons. It is not so much the actual journalists or editors doing their jobs, although their opportunities for manipulation should not be underestimated either. The intentions aimed at manipulating political intent, or, more precisely, the political forces are much more characteristic of the owners.

On the world stage both the Left and the Right have had their own significant press barons, who, explicitly or unexplicitly, mix their economic ventures with political ambitions. The names of Robert Maxwell and Rupert Murdoch are well-known in Hungary too, the former one became known as a supporter of left-wing objectives, while the latter one sympathised with the Right. Both of them tried the Hungarian market too, but Maxwell was prevented from expanding further because of his death under strange circumstances, while Murdoch left because of business considerations. Anyway, Hungarian journalists were able to experience a little of the methods of both press barons.

The competition between the two multibillionaires lasting for decades, using every single imaginable and unimaginable method in business was described in a rather naturalistic way by Jeffrey Archer, an English bestseller writer, in his book *The Fourth Estate*. Archer, who became known as a Tory member of parliament, could not escape from the press or rather Murdoch investigating his own past. Because of a lie he told in connection with one of his women-affairs, his relationship with the media got so bad that after mutual libel suits finally Sir Jeffrey, who had been knighted in the meantime, was sentenced to prison. (He got out recently, and he is not planning to reveal the past of press barons in any more books.)

Leading politicians are also experiencing the lashes of the press, which often considers itself as a branch of power, on their own skin. I can mention here the series of revealing articles published in the renowned American daily, *The Washington Post*, which started the Watergate scandal, and it resulted in President Nixon having to leave the White House before his time expired.

One might say to this that the sun does not rise because the cock crows, and the president of the United States does not fail, because the press writes reproaching articles. Of course, the picture is subtler than this, and innumerable examples could be mentioned of the press being used as a tool in the struggle for power between different economic-political interest groups.

It does happen quite often that the instructions are whispered from the background, the owners manipulate the public to suit their own interests or the interests of their connections.

Anyway, I do not share the view according to which the press is a branch of power. I find such opinions absolutely wrong.

I think that the primary task of mass communication is to reflect the facts occurring in different fields of life in the most authentic, reliable and objective way. The press should convey everything that actually happens; it should act as a filter. But there is a very important problem in connection with this function: whether the filter really separates unnecessary and significant information, or it distorts the picture, intentionally or unintentionally, while it performs its task.

The reliability of filtering is a basic professional aspect in journalism: as a reader, a member of the audience or a viewer I must be able to trust the different means of communication that they select important and less interesting news with the greatest benevolence and according to their best professional knowledge. This is what I find the greatest challenge to journalism; and it is so, because in the present there is such a tremendous amount of information all the time that even specialists who deal with news as their profession find it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.

It will not make me popular with journalists, I still have to say it: presently neither the international nor the Hungarian press performs the filtering task described above. More precisely speaking, they mostly convey a distorted picture of reality. The greatest problem is that the press has a basically negative approach, it is increasingly populist, which I find is a better word to describe the press than just to say that it is tabloid-like. Tabloid sounds more innocent, it does not express the main point clearly: sensationalism is increasingly combined with political messages. For example, in the British press for months before the expansion of the European Union they were trying to scare readers irresponsibly, they painted a dark picture of the millions of immigrants expected from the Eastern European region. These efforts to create mass hysterics were completely lacking in reality, and even the British realise it now, still it left a negative feeling behind, and the most dangerous thing is that in the campaign nationalistic ideas were used, which are frightening with respect to the British judgement of the future of the European community.

If the facts of life are described in the press in a distorted way, what could we expect from so-called opinionated journalism, which is mostly distorted, deficient, manipulated and in the worst case its opinions are based on facts that never took place? Journalism that excludes reality and disregards facts cannot encourage me to think on, as I cannot agree with the distorted starting point, I am not interested in the conclusions. These are disheartening phenomena of today's journalism, especially when we know that about a decade ago the Hungarian press did a really good job in helping people orient themselves among the confusing circumstances of the period around the change of the political regime.

I find that the issue of the responsibility of journalism is not a restricted, internal, professional question, although it would be good, if the people concerned made an effort to create order in the moral and professional confusion. However, it is not enough, and journalism cannot really be expected to exercise self-control in the near future.

Those who seemingly report on facts and convey opinions based on these facts bear enormous responsibility. Sometimes I have the feeling that journalists and editors are not aware of the significance and consequences of what they provide for the public day by day. Very rarely the sobering effect of a lost press court case concluded with a financial loss can be felt, but unfortunately even these suits mostly encourage autotelic revenge campaigns, and they generate a “just wait until we will find something shameful in your past” type of mentality.

Whether they like it or not, the press must face its own responsibility. Journalists often deal with the question of medical malpractice, and they harshly criticise negligent doctors. They are right to do so, this is not the problem, although I must make a remark here that doctors found responsible for malpractice are thoroughly punished by their professional forum, the medical association. This is right, because medical interventions affecting people’s lives and health are involved here. Although it is true that in most cases malpractice takes place with respect to a single person.

But journalists and editors who provide false information and distorted facts hurt the sense of justice of tens, hundreds of thousands or even millions of people, they create negative feelings in them. Lies and distortions can cause an enormous amount of trouble.

From all this it can be concluded that laws should be just as strict with respect to journalism as any other profession. If the architect who designs a house badly and it collapses, or the treacherous lawyer, or the doctor committing malpractice can be called to account, journalists who make mistakes should be treated similarly. There is hardly any news about journalists being banned from exercising their profession, although the mistakes they make often have tragic consequences.

I know the British and obviously the Hungarian press quite well, and in general I have a negative opinion of both. When talking to my friends I express my standpoint more roughly than now, when I simply say that both the British and the Hungarian press are vile. The press of the British, who are known for their reserved and cool nature, reflects a completely different image.

The language of the press is banal, the “stylistic” phrases they use in their writings could generate fights even in a suburban pub. No one is surprised in Britain when a politician, artist or sportsman is simply referred to as a rat, and this sounds like a polite title as compared to others.

Luckily, in Hungary the situation is not quite as bad, although there have been similar cases in the gutter-press, but these publications are not widely available. On the basis of my own experience I know how much an interviewed person is exposed to the journalist. I was in a situation many times, when I had the feeling that before the journalist sat down to interview me he had decided what he wanted to get out of the conversation, and he was not willing to change this intention even when it turned out that his concept was wrong or unfounded. It also happened that the journalist was on the wrong path from the very beginning and knew it, but he was not interested in the truth, because it was not interesting.

The greatest problem is that in cases like this I feel helpless. I may refuse to give an interview; it is not compulsory to sit down for a chat with journalists. But for politicians publicity is an element of vital significance, and journalists are very much aware of it. They can blackmail me any time saying that my opinion will not be published. It is a powerful weapon, and all the

majority of politicians can do is to bow to their blackmailers' demands. Publicity for politicians is like a canvas for painters. But while artists can buy their canvas, politicians cannot buy publicity. Or if they do, they will become participants of the nasty game commonly known as corruption.

Before I start to deal with this subtle question in detail, I must point out that I do not want to generalise. The general disheartening description of the press given above must be supplemented by saying that there are many journalists who do their job correctly and bravely and deserve recognition for it, both abroad and in Hungary. Undoubtedly journalism can be a very dangerous profession for those who do their job correctly. I have recently read that in 2003 thirty-six journalists were killed in the world because they were doing their job; some of them were war correspondents and some of them were carrying out investigations to reveal cases of corruption.

Independently of all this, the world of the media cannot escape from the cancer of corruption, which can also be observed in Hungary. Cynically speaking Hungary is free and corrupt. Similarly to nearly all domestic economy and society, a thousand different forms of corruption infect journalism, too.

Let me make a little detour here: in summer 2004 I spent my holiday with my family on a small island in the Mediterranean. When after doing some scuba diving, which was a wonderful experience, I wanted to pay the guide, he politely avoided me saying "later, later". I "chased" him all day, I wanted get over financial affairs, but he would not let me pay him. When finally late at night I still wanted to persuade him, he told me that he did not have his invoice book with him, and we would settle our accounts when he has it. Compared to this in Hungary it is a national sport not to issue an invoice, and tax-dodgers are the heroes of our era. Interestingly enough even those who fail to pay taxes find it natural to use public services, although they do not pay for their maintenance.

In countries infected with corruption special attention should be made to the pureness of the media. It also involves that the owners of press empires should pay their journalists well, so that they cannot be bribed. (Of course here I presume that the owners themselves are not corrupt.)

Recently the International Public Relations Association carried out a survey in 54 countries, from which it turned out that in our region, that is in South and Eastern Europe, two-thirds of the people asked thought that the journalists in the country were corrupt, because in return of money they write favourable articles or broadcast programmes ordered by external persons. Aiden White, General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, said to the International Herald Tribune in connection with this data that while brave journalists risk their lives and health every day for the freedom of the press and for human rights, others throw a shadow on these sacrifices.

The Hungarian press should be purified as soon as possible, even if the surrounding world, the economic and political sphere is corrupt, too. They have their own means to set a good example. For the time being all I see is the Hungarian press reflecting its own internal state onto the country: its internal scandals, its corruptness, its vileness, its lack of knowledge and its sensationalism. I know: it is a small country with a small press. I know: the media is also lacking money very much. I know: Hungarian newspapers cannot afford to let their journalists

work on a single case for weeks or months. But there is no other way really. In the course of investigative journalism facts must be revealed, and this requires money and time.

It cannot be avoided, because sooner or later the Hungarian press will lose its creditworthiness. Clowning with television programmes based on western licences and with the silly star stories of the tabloids can be continued for a while, but real news and opinions cannot be neglected for much longer.

Unfortunately a significant number of Hungarian journalists are lacking in proper skills. I have given many interviews in the last few years, and I must say that maybe in one out of ten interviews I felt that the interviewer knew whom he was talking to and about what. I do not want to mention either newspapers or names here.

Facts, those goddamn facts are so often distorted by the filter. Is it due to mere negligence? Or laziness? Or a lack of knowledge? Whatever is the cause, the press bears the same responsibility. Architects, engineers, doctors cannot excuse themselves either when they make mistakes. Journalists should also be required to strictly comply with certain ethical and professional standards.

Politics and the media depend on each other. Politicians and journalists also depend on each other. Their relationships should be based on fair principles. High-quality politics is required for high-quality journalism, and vice versa. Politics should be strong enough to take the first steps towards achieving better quality. I hope the press will follow it.

# Epilogue

(Peter Mandelson)

The Policy Network is the think tank of the European progressive left – this is how the initiative established at the end of the nineties under the wings of the British Labour Party is introduced most often in the news. The idea to create a forum of centre-left parties dealing with the theoretical issues of progressive governance was conceived at a meeting summoned by Tony Blair for European left-wing prime ministers. Peter Mandelson, the British prime minister's counsellor, who left the government twice creating scandals, became the leading personality of the Policy Network, and in the meantime he was also appointed the British commissioner of the European Union responsible for the trade.

Since the end of the nineties the meeting of left-wing prime ministers has been held regularly every year, since 2002 Péter Medgyessy has represented Hungary at the discussions. The Policy Network (PN) always acts in the background of the meetings of the European left-wing leaders, on the one part in its high-standard periodical theory publication it publishes studies in connection with issue the followers show the greatest concern about, and it summons conferences where topics introduced by invited lecturers are discussed. The PN is independent of the Labour Party, but it operates as its ideological department. Its tasks do not involve creating programs; its main endeavour is to outline the most important guidelines.

In the nineties I showed great concern about European issues, but it was not until 1997 that I undertook an intensive role in politics. I was elected Member of Parliament in the electoral district of Angyalföld, Budapest. As a member of parliament delegated by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), still in opposition during the period of the Orbán government, I often met the leaders of other European left-wing parties. The leaders of the MSZP delegated me to these meetings, because of my knowledge of English, but I must sincerely admit that I have always taken international relationships very seriously, and I like to work in this field. At the meetings the question of the European integration was obviously always on the agenda. From 1998 I maintained continuous communication with the appropriate representatives of the other European left-wing parties, and I always tried to give a precise response to their questions. I was still a member of parliament in opposition when the British invited me to take part in a political seminar.

After the MSZP won the elections in 2002 the British Labour Party established an even closer relationship with us, especially with the members of the new, young generation of socialist politicians. I joined the Socialist Party after the elections of 1998 where I won in the individual electoral district of Angyalföld, Budapest, and I became chairman of the integration committee.

As a part of establishing relationships, in 2001 the Labour Party invited me to take part in the campaign for the British general election and learn from it. I was an active participant at the events, I took part in the organising work, at the meetings I met activists and supporting families, I was asked to hand out leaflets and go and visit electors in their homes, which is called knocking and is completely accepted in British campaigns.

As a part of the campaign, once the staff was walking along the main street of a small town, we stopped to talk to passers-by, and of course we were wearing the red rosette of the Labour Party. Then suddenly a well-built man shouted at us from a cabriolet: "Traitors!" There were the ten of us: nine British and myself, the only Hungarian. They kept apologising and consoling me for being called a traitor too. I smiled and told them that in Hungary even worse expressions are used, and not only during the campaign. Anyway, it was the first time in my life I was called a traitor, and it happened in the UK.

In the course of the campaign we also visited housing estates where workers lived, and I must say that they are not much different from the pre-fabricated blocks of flats found in Hungary. On one of these occasions we were putting leaflets in the letter boxes of the apartments, and the British activists were telling me to push the leaflets in completely, because if they hang out, the members of the conservative party who might follow us would take them out. I took their advice and I pushed each leaflet right inside, until something happened and I let out a terrible scream of fright: on the other side of the door a dog did not really appreciate my enthusiasm, and it simply bit my hand. I learnt that one has to be careful when pushing leaflets in letterboxes.

We visited families in pairs or in groups of three, and on such occasions we talked to people about the Labour party program; we asked them if they vote at all. We always had a list from which we always knew exactly which party the individual families sympathise with. On one occasion an elderly lady let us in, and I introduced myself to her too. When she heard my foreign name she asked me if I was from abroad, and if yes, whether I was planning to return to my country. When I said yes, she only said: "Then you are a good man."

On another occasion my partner and I were describing the challenges of globalism in detail, when one of the electors said: "All right, I understand. But could you mend the pavement first? Then we can talk about globalism."

In the UK there are no campaigning restrictions relating to the days directly preceding the elections, canvassing is allowed even on the day of the elections. So we sat in the car and announced the slogans of the Labour party through a loudspeaker all day long. Time after time we went in different polling stations where the activists of all parties were standing at the entrance with a list in their hand, writing down the names of those who had already come and given their votes. They were even helping each other when they could not hear somebody's name properly. Some electors told them their name and also the name of the party they voted for.

By the afternoon in the local party headquarters they more or less know who has cast their vote and who hasn't. They quickly go and visit those who haven't voted yet, and they try to convince them even if they do not know which party they prefer. Often people can vote instead of their family members or neighbours, and they can identify themselves with any personal document they have with them. They can even vote in a letter. The British say that there is not much abuse, and they think that on a statistical basis election frauds more or less counterbalance each other.

So I started to deal with international relationships "on the ground floor", but I do not regret it, because I gained great experience. In the course of my election campaigns in Angyalföld I use my experience gained in the UK when I hand out leaflets and put up posters.

After winning the Hungarian parliamentary elections in 2002 I continued my international work even more intensively. In December 2003 the representatives of Policy Network visited me and asked me to be a member of their presiding board. Before that I was invited to London where I was received by 6-7 of Prime Minister Tony Blair's counsellors. I felt greatly honoured by meeting them in the cabinet office, where the British prime minister meets the inner cabinet of his government. They were asking me questions in connection with various topics, and I came to realise that I was actually being examined.

I felt greatly honoured when not long after the "examination" I was elected to the presiding board, as the most prominent representatives of the European progressive Left take part in the work of this think-tank: Peter Mandelson mentioned above, Anthony Giddens (I was asked to reflect on one of his conference lectures), Giuliano Amato, Joaquim Almunia, Danuta Hubner, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen. These are the foremost names of centre-left ideas. Not long after I was asked, in April 2004 I was elected to the presiding board.

It was at the meetings of the Policy Network that I first understood what sort of image they have about Hungarians at European forums. To put it briefly: "we are clever but unreliable". The way we neglect our international relationships is legendary: we register ourselves to attend a meeting, and we do not appear; it is even worse when we do not register ourselves but appear at a meeting; they ask us to submit our contributions in writing, but we reflect on certain issues orally. We regularly fail to keep deadlines or to fulfil our undertakings, but we are very good at making excuses. We often tell lies and undertake things that we are unable to fulfil.

I always tried to contravene the above statements, and I keep to the rules of the game as much as I can. The members of the British Left are utterly helpful; in their relationships they are confident, open and sincere. They never keep their opinions to themselves, so I know what they think about Hungarians. They are consistent in realising their decisions and they stick solidly to their choices. I myself experienced it, because when here in Hungary, inside my own party I had disputes, my British friends never had doubts about me, they stood beside me.

The presiding board of the Policy Network determines the topics to be discussed one or two years ahead. It sets up a political agenda, which is then submitted to the socialist representative body of the European Parliament as a proposal.

This is why I did not want to be a candidate before the European elections, because I have enough possibilities of influencing the work going on there anyway. And the leadership of the MSZP also made a decision that individually elected members of parliament cannot be put on the list.

I find it very important to take an active part in Hungarian political life. As a member of the Hungarian parliament I have much more opportunity to influence political processes, including the processes in Brussels. At the moment the European Parliament is a consulting body, and it has no real licence. I have much more possibilities here, in Hungary, and it will probably remain the same for some time.

I am bringing up my two sons on my own, I would not like to leave them here. European members of parliament spend a lot of time away from home. I could take my sons with me,

but they do not want to live abroad permanently. They like this country, this city, Angyalföld, their old school and their friends.

Hungary is their future. It is our common future, where after 2010, I hope, everything will be different.