

ACTA

KONFERENCIA

*Konferencia Kiss Sándor professzor emlékére**
(Budapest, PPKE JÁK, 2008. október 18.)

Alexandre Kiss Memorial Conference
(Budapest, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 18 October 2008)

ADDRESS

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues, dear Friends,

You would excuse me for addressing you as “Friends”. The reason for this is very simple: the person who brought today this small “family circle” together was a friend of all of us present here.

Let me start with my personal memories. When I was a young student I often heard a name at home from my father who had great respect for a famous Hungarian-born scholar living in France, at that time a remote country, the friendship of whom he was very proud of. Alexander Kiss, indeed Kiss Sándor was also well known by my sister, so the name was a very frequently quoted one in the family. It was only decades after, in an entirely different historic situation that I first met Alex or Sándor in person. My country needed his help in the now famous Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dispute, that I had to handle in my new capacity of State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sándor immediately offered his unique professional skills. That was how we started

* A következőkben a konferencia előadásai az elhangzás sorrendjében jelennek meg.

to work together and I was amazed not only by his intellect and knowledge, but also by his commitment and dedication.

But who was, first and foremost, Professor Alexander Kiss or Kiss Sándor?

He was referred to as the best known French international lawyer abroad, that is in the world outside of France. This is no doubt true and was amply demonstrated by dozens of books, hundreds of articles, a ground-breaking academic work, a unique contribution to the elaboration of new principals of international law such as the common concern for humanity, the common heritage of mankind, the rights of future generations (intergenerational justice), all the concepts that are now daily bread and butter even of the political discourse. He was a scholar, a teacher, a mentor, a very able professional lawyer, a man of inspiration and at the same time a successful activist in the best sense of the term. He participated, initiated, presided the work of a large number of international organisations, the list of which would be too long to quote. A man of foresight, who was always ahead of the conventional thinking of his time and always anticipated the major global developments.

Yes, Alex was certainly the most well known French international lawyer, but allow me to tell you that here in this country we also believe that he was one of the most talented Hungarians of the 20th century. I hope you do not take it for boosting when I add that this is certainly not a small thing in the light of the achievements of talented Hungarians in the 20th century. Unfortunately, we are much less ambitious as for the 21th century.

He left his country at the worst times, in other words at the right time. He immediately got in contact with the activities of the that time Hungarian political emigration and did not need another ten years or more – as many of his contemporaries in France and elsewhere – to understand the true nature of communism. In other words, he did not need to become a communist, to be able to turn to an anticommunist of principle at a later stage. This clear vision of moral stance brought him in contact with some other persons of foresight like for instance Helene Carrere d'Encausse, somebody who anticipated the implosion of the Soviet Empire well before it actually happened.

Hungary lost Kiss Sándor and many other talented Hungarians because of the curves of history. The question is sometimes asked what would have happened if all these persons had stayed in Hungary, what could have been achieved with all these persons by the country? The pessimistic and realistic answer to the question is that not much. If all these people remained where they were born, many of them would have been put in prison, again many of them would have been silenced, or perhaps the most of them would only have become passive and could not have unfolded their unique intellectual gifts.

What was, however, a loss for the country was certainly a benefit for the world.

And the best known French international lawyer found the way to bring huge benefits for his native country as well. In the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros case he worked with very special dedication, because I believe, he sensed that the case was more than just a simple international legal dispute, it was something that involved two fundamental principles, indeed, two symbols, both being the fundaments of his academic and political thinking. One was the protection of environment, the rights of the future generations and the other was democracy. The Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam was for most Hungarians

the symbol of the complete neglect and contempt of public opinion by an autocratic dictatorship. That was what made Sándor a dedicated fighter in the case, that was why he deployed all his theoretical and professional skills and drafted amazingly high quality memorials for the Hague Court of International Justice.

We, in this country now feel the need for persons like him stronger than ever before. But it is not only Hungary, but also Europe and the whole world that needs personalities of his intellectual and moral standing. Speaking about Europe, it also has to be underlined that he was a fervent believer in the European integration process, in fact, in the genuine reunification of our continent.

On the global level we now need persons of the same foresight and anticipation. We definitely need much more and better global governance, and also much more global rulemaking, otherwise, it will be impossible to rethink, review and “refonder” the capitalism which we certainly should have done earlier, well before the financial crisis exploded. Now it can no longer be disputed that the global financial system needs more efficient regulation and control in order to avoid future even deeper financial and economic crisis. It is now becoming more and more clear that environment, human rights and the global financial and economic system cannot be addressed separately, all these areas are intrinsically interlinked by the universal values upon which the global, European and national rulemaking should be based upon.

We need persons of foresight like Alex. We need such lighthouses the light of which benefits everybody, even those who did not contribute to the costs of the lighthouse itself. That is the nature of public goods that are now apparently in scarcity all over the world.

Alexander Kiss, Kiss Sándor was such a lighthouse. We only have to see and recognise the light he was spreading and to benefit from it. I understand, this is the primary objective of this conference and I am, together with many Hungarians, very grateful to the organizers. I wish you a very successful conference.

