

ALEXANDRE CHARLES KISS – AS I KNEW HIM

PÉTER KOVÁCS
University Professor (PPKE JÁK)

I. Alex as a professor

I first heard about Alex from my professors of international law. When I got the scholarship of the Centre Européen Universitaire of Nancy in order to study European law, they advised me to ask him for an appointment. At that time, he was the secretary general of the International Institute of Human Rights of Strasbourg. At the end of our meeting when, by the way, I realized how profoundly he had preserved his attachment to his country of origin and his mother tongue, he suggested that I should submit an application for the 1984 summer session of the Institute.

Following his proposal, I applied for the session and got a grant from the Institute to cover my costs.

What an interesting company I met there! The young American scholar, Dinah Shelton who – I guess it is rather exceptional – introduced me in French to the jurisprudence of the Inter-american Court of Human Rights. The director of studies was a young Rumanian assistant professor, Adrian Nastase, and there was also a Polish researcher, Roman Wieruszewski.

The Institute was still located at the quai Lezay-Marnésia, in the building of a former monastery, and Alex often mentioned – although he truly loved life on earth – that his faith and that of his collaborators in the importance of their work was as deep as the spirit of the building inspired.

Despite of this spiritual heritage, it was a tradition to organize receptions in the courtyard. Alex told me that I must not miss the occasion car all those people present would be diplomats, ministers, professors – „They will be your colleagues.” I considered it as mere politeness and encouragement. I deeply doubted that, coming from the other side of the iron curtain, I would have the same chance to succeed as the other participants of the session.

Today, life has proved how right he was. The former young Rumanian director of studies who helped me when I was preparing for the exams of the diploma of the Institute, first became minister of foreign affairs of his country, later president of the

house of representatives and still later prime minister (even if Adrian Nastase's career is shadowed by accusation of corruption). Roman Wieruszewski's name figures at the bottom of the so called Mazowiecki-reports on atrocities committed in the former Yugoslavia by Milosevic and consorts. Some years ago, he was the vice-chairperson of the U.N. Human Rights Committee.

Alex delivered us a lecture, on the restrictions and limitations of human rights. It was well structured and interesting so lawyers and non-lawyers could equally follow it: the latter could understand the legal problems, and the formers could see the political realities fighting with legal considerations. He was fair and impartial examiner, still he was very happy when he could hand me my diploma, because I was the first Hungarian who got it.

II. Alex as the boss

He invited me to act as director of studies of the Institute in 1989 and he proposed also to teach an introductory course for beginners in human rights law. I was 30 years old and this was my first invitation to teach abroad. Alex was still secretary general of the Institute and in this capacity, he put a special emphasis to enlarge the network of the teaching staff – but not only in the pedagogical sense but also as a community of friends. The regular weekly dinners with professors and special guests were very important for him in order to assess the impressions of colleagues, to plan the next or later sessions or to decide on the theme of a common research-project. This does not mean however that his dinners would be boring professional intercourses – on the contrary, happy and friendly meetings where stories, jokes were alternating with professional items.

He was very open to social problems of the participants of the session as well. Although the financial background of the Institute was limited, and the procedure to get a scholarship was complicated with imperative deadlines, Alex always pondered his decisions and examined carefully each individual application. I was witness to his careful decision making when we had to decide on admissibility for exams of the famous diploma.

III. Alex as a colleague and a friend

Alex was open to cooperation with the whole world: as he told me once, it would be very difficult to find a country where he had not been invited to teach. The items of his bibliography are extremely high especially in environmental matters where he became soon someone who cannot be neglected when studying the legal coordinates. However a single invitation was enough for him to come readily to Miskolc in order to contribute to a common research about history of international law where he analyzed the 19th century diplomatic manoeuvring around Crete: when analyzing history, he put emphasis on open or hidden similarities with today's' international protectorates and other special status.

IV. Alex the globetrotter French citizen who remained Hungarian

We, Hungarians, also present in this solemn festivity hall, are very proud to have known Alex. In like manner, he was very proud of all Hungarian diploma holders who are at important posts today: in the staff of the Council of Europe and other international organizations or in the European Parliament, as deputy. He considered that the exam of the Institute should be a difficult one (it was and certainly it is the same today) in order to open doors elsewhere. One of his early discovered young colleagues, András Baka became the first Hungarian judge in the European Court of Human Rights.

His relationship with his country of origin was never broken. When he organized the Santa Clara external sessions in Budapest, or the environmental study and research program with professor Bándi here at the Péter Pázmány Catholic University, he also had in mind that in this way he could contribute to the renewal of Hungary and the neighbouring countries. He donated books to the library of the Miskolc University and he was working for a DVD-multimedia interview about international environmental law with my young colleagues but fate decided otherwise.

I heard several times how proud he was of his title of „external member of the Hungarian Academy of Science” and of the fact that he was invited to act in the Hungarian team of the Gabčíkovo/Nagymaros Dam project dispute before the International Court of Justice or in the team of the so called river Tisza cyanide pollution assessment team. It meant him a lot for him that his country of origin (the citizenship of which he had never lost and the passport of which he acquired in the nineties) trusts him and that relies on him in important matters.

Alex got probably everything that an international lawyer can expect.

I am honoured that I knew him and could work with him. I am a lucky man.

Thank you, Alex.

