

LAUDATION

on the occasion of bestowing the

JUSTITIA REGNORUM FUNDAMENTUM AWARD

on István Farkas

“It is only by making value-based action founded on respect for life and a moderate lifestyle general practice that we can live a happy and sensible life and preserve our natural and social resources for the generations to come.” This statement – uttered by István Farkas, Executive Chair, then Co-Chair of the Association of Hungarian Nature Defenders (MTVSZ) at the thirty-year jubilee ceremony of the existence of MTVSZ – could very well be the thesis sentence of the mission statement of the Deputy Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, Ombudsman for Future Generations and his staff at the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights.

Not only is this statement true and to the point, not only does it capture vividly how we could escape from the dead-end street of the social and economic dynamic that exploits nature, which is supposed to serve as the foundation of human existence, a trap which has been increasingly closing on humanity – it is also genuine. For the person who utters it has devoted his life to making all of this a reality with his family members and colleagues, thus setting an example for value-based action and a moderate lifestyle protecting the interests of future generations, to individuals and communities alike. This is how István Farkas has emerged as a decisive figure of the Hungarian environmentalist profession and movement, earning recognition both within the environmentalist movement and in a wide circle of cooperation partners.

Having obtained an MSc, then a PhD in Chemical Engineering, István Farkas worked for various organizations of environmental protection in Budapest. The focal point of his professional career has been the community, or even the community of communities, which he had joined in the early stages of his career, and the values of which he had internalized, then, as Executive Chair, faithfully preserved and continued to enrich. This community is none else than one of the most prestigious environmentalist civil society organizations, the Association of Hungarian Nature Defenders, as much in terms of organizational strength as in those of its professional esteem and diversified activities, whose name has become synonymous with that of István Farkas, and which, in this way, is essentially a co-award-winner of this distinction.

As an umbrella organization, MTVSZ manages and coordinates the work of civil society organizations operating in all regions of the country, and involved in local, regional and national matters. In his leadership position, István Farkas has maintained the atmosphere of familial cooperation, and facilitated the work of local organizations by ensuring the bilateral information flow, sharing best practices, and offering training programs. Recognizing the importance of small jobs in environmental protection, and practicing this principle in its member organizations countrywide, under István Farkas’s direction, MTVSZ has sought to draw the attention of decision-makers and citizens alike to the root of environmental problems, i.e. to our unsustainable lifestyle. “It is not technical or superficial political solutions that we believe in. We consider it essential to introduce radical changes in our thinking, morality, as well as in our production and consumption patterns.” The goal of MTVSZ is to protect nature as a whole and to facilitate the implementation of sustainable development. “Instead of the primacy of material values, universal human values must be placed in the foreground.”

Their community actions and lobbying activities rest firmly on a long line of professional events hosted in cooperation with the representatives of sciences, public administration, and the economic sector, as well as premium studies and publications. An additional important tool in attitude-shaping is the implementation of environmental education in practice through their member organizations.

Instead of competition, economic growth, globalization, and the unlimited freedom of the individual that reinforce the alienation of the individual from the community, MTVSZ proclaims the precedence of cooperation, sustainability, precaution, the local pursuit of happiness, responsibility for others and the environment, generosity, and love because these can amplify the harmony between people and the environment.

With István Farkas's direction, MTVSZ has put forth consistent criticism regarding an environmental policy that treats the cause of environmental protection merely as a question of infrastructural development and reduces it to a couple of major environmental protection investment projects that can be funded from EU funds. It has been a relentless critic of an environmental policy that does not sufficiently strive to prevent environmental damages and mitigate environmental harms related to economic development, or to ensure a transition towards sustainability and social justice, to conserve nature and natural resources, and to halt the diminution of biodiversity.

Under István Farkas's leadership, MTVSZ has maintained and strengthened its extensive system of international relations, and through that, as the Hungarian branch of Friends of the Earth, as well as the associate partner of the European Environmental Bureau and other international organizations, it has earned a reputation for the Hungarian environmentalist movement by its contribution to the shaping of the European environmental policy. The association maintains professional cooperation in the domains of sustainable development, regional and energy policy, the "greening" of international financial institutions, tax justice, agriculture and food safety, as well as development policy.

On the level of the European Union, subsidiarity is recommended as the main organizing principle of economic policy, which ensures the autonomy of each region and country and strengthens their ability to be self-sufficient. MTVSZ gives high priority to moderating the effects of climate change, integrating the criteria of sustainability in the public policies, promoting and supporting nature-friendly agriculture, which is free of genetic engineering, action against harmful infrastructural and industrial investments, as well as the environmental education of youth.

The in-depth knowledge, strategic thinking, community approach and strong interpersonal skills of István Farkas, furthermore, his readiness to compromise in order to find meaningful solutions have helped the harmonization of environmental, economic and social interests in such national institutions as the National Council for Sustainable Development and the National Environmental Council, in the work of which he was actively involved for several years. He always stood up for participatory democracy, the strengthening of social dialogue, the involvement of civil society organizations in decision-making, as well as enhancing environmental awareness. Under his leadership, MTVSZ established fruitful professional partnerships with a high number of players of the central and local administrations, as well as those of the scientific and academic fields.

MTVSZ and István Farkas are our Office's regular cooperation partners in organizing professional conferences and seminars on the key issues concerning sustainable development. Our partnership is of a strategic nature, we support and acknowledge each other's endeavors. This award is the solemn proclamation of this idea, in the hope that our joint efforts taken in the interests of future generations will continue in the future.

Budapest, 9 December 2019