

# Laudation

## of György Kalas on the occasion of handing him the Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award



György Kalas is a lawyer and the legal adviser of the Reflex Environmental Association. Perhaps there is no environment protection activist in Hungary who does not know his name from his lectures, publications or studies. Among green activists, or as he likes to call them ‘fellow fighters’, he stands out with his professionalism, whereas professional environmental lawyers appreciate him for his commitment and enthusiasm.

The lifework of “Kalasgyuri”, as environmental activists fondly call him, is about making environmental law understandable and transposing it into everyday practice. We encounter durable results of his work in almost every area of environmental law from environmental education, thorough waste management, to the application of the Aarhus Convention.

He was born in Mátészalka and came to like nature by growing up on the banks of the river Ipoly. He went to primary school in Balassagyarmat, and finished secondary school in Salgótarján as a machinist. During his eventful career he was a carpenter and turner in Balassagyarmat, and production technician in a textile machine factory in the GDR (for the sake of the younger generation German Democratic Republic or East Germany). Coming back to Hungary he had to do his military service and thereafter he was in charge of the Tourist Office in Balassagyarmat. In the meantime he studied law at the Faculty of Law of Eötvös Lóránt University at a correspondence course, graduating therefrom in 1981. After practising law he took a specialist examination as a legal adviser, and later on he also became a lawyer.

In 1985 he moved to Győr, where he started his career in environment protection. First he worked as a legal adviser at the West-Transdanubian Inspectorate of the National Environment and Nature Office. As the only lawyer he was in charge of the multi-faceted legal work of the authority, supervising three counties at that time.

In 1987, with his friends committed to environment protection and social change, he founded the first civil society organisation of the country registered as having an environment protection purpose, the Reflex Environmental Association of Győr.

After the merger of the National Environment Office and the National Water Office in 1989 he stayed on for another six months in the staff of the Ministry for Environment Protection and Water. At the legal department of the water part of the ministry, his earlier interesting and meaningful work

became more and more difficult to bear from a psychological point of view, therefor in the summer of 1989 he became a civil society activist by way of a two-year ecological program of the Soros Foundation, called Green Zone, which he was in charge of. Since 1989 he has been working at Reflex as a civil society activist, so he has suspended his activities as a lawyer.

The change of system György Kalas made in his career in 1989 can be considered as symbolic: from the environment protection inspectorate (authority) he went to work for the Reflex Association (civil society actor), where instead of authorising the construction works of the river dam at Bős-Nagymaros, he worked on giving back Széchenyi Square in Győr to the pedestrians.

At the Reflex Association his main specialty is environmental education; up to the present day he has been helping the work of those teaching environmental education with his very high level and often humorous lectures and writings. He was the first in Hungary to acquire deeper knowledge in the subject of relay towers for mobile telephones and the dangers of non-ionising radiation. Besides, he also deals with the legal aspects of urban development, traffic, ecological consumer protection, waste management, protection against noise, and with the organisation of environment-friendly events, with environmental consulting and healthy nutrition.

In his recently published volume of interviews entitled ‘The 35 Shades of Green’, he tells about the heroic beginnings: ‘We would have liked a more beautiful and more liveable environment and a generation which understands and is concerned for the living conditions on Earth, knows the ecological interrelations, and hence is able to protect our world’. As a pioneer, he threw himself with great elan and hope into the testing of progressive Acts (such as the Data Protection Act or the Environmental Act) adopted at the time and hoped to use the possibilities offered by them to make a contribution in the legal process. He gave a helping hand to the formation and registration of new civil society organisations and to the creation of the organisational framework of the environment protection movement. He assisted the foundation of several associations and foundations, such as the Waste Working Alliance, the Climate Protection Alliance of Hungary, the Hungarian Network of Eco-counselling Offices, the Bakony Railway Alliance, the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation, and the Civil Foundation ‘Against Cancer, for Humanity, for Tomorrow’, and also participated in their operation.

The period of 1990 to 1996 was important in his career because the first Competition Act allowed it for civil society activists to start proceedings in competition supervision matters and to participate as parties in such proceedings. From the very beginning he had considered waste management problems in their context of ecological consumer protection, so during this period he instituted more than 50, mainly environmental proceedings for misleading consumers. These proceedings greatly contributed to the development of the sensitivity of Competition Authority officials for environmental matters.

He has headed the free Legal Aid Service of Reflex since 1992. He has submitted several petitions to the courts, the Constitutional Court, and the Offices of the Parliamentary Commissioners, and he has participated in the social consultations about planned legislation. As an environmental law expert, he has contributed to several projects and has called attention to the importance of protecting the environment on numerous occasions. He has summarised the lessons to be learned from more significant cases in several information brochures: he has focused public attention, among others, on such literally vital issues as nutritional additives, background radiation, the environmental effects of organising events and the vicious circle of publicity, consumption and waste. Now, with the

coming of age of the environmental movement, he has devoted himself to explaining to environmental activists certain areas of the civil society application and control of law, more specifically the application of law by authorities, the application in practice of the Aarhus Convention, the importance of exercising clients' rights, and the enforcement of access to data of public interest.

Everything he does is permeated by the responsibility he feels for the world which we are borrowing from our grandchildren. His way of life in itself sets an example: he never puts his own person to the front, but effaces himself in the interest of his causes, tasks and his desire for improvement. The best witness to his ability to remain human even among inhuman circumstances is the fact that one of the things he values most is the working team, the people who have been with him for 25 years in the Reflex Association.

Dr. György Kalas has shown exemplary human qualities and performed outstanding professional work in the fields of the protection of the fundamental right to a healthy environment and of environment protection, achieving thereby extraordinary and exceptional results and significantly contributing to such achievements. The Commissioner for Fundamental Rights has decided to grant him the *Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum* Award in 2012 as recognition of his lifework and professional career.

Budapest, 15 June 2012