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MR. GABOR DEMSZKY

Mayor of the City of Budapest

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome the participants of the Conference. As Mayor of Budapest it is a great pleasure to me that our city is the host of such an internationally renowned event, especially if the topic of discussion bears as crucial significance to all of us as in the case of this Conference.

Environmental protection is not only an issue of utmost importance, it is a field where problem solving depends on an ongoing international exchange of information and the provision of assistance.

The democratic reforms in Central-Eastern Europe changed the political map of Europe with unexpected speed. The restructuring of the economic systems in the countries of the region has also begun, resulting in large-scale openness towards Western markets. While the socialist economy was worshipping quantitative data on production, no expected quality of life was a principal. The present half-way-house to a true market economy is dominated by certain attributes of infant capitalism together with certain left-overs of the communist hangover. Neither one is sensitive to environmental hazards. While in Western countries environmentalists have been taking a stand for decades now, in Eastern Europe environmental protection were dispersed and not able to foster environment prone thinking because of the general anti-democratic nature of the state and communism busy preventing the consolidation of a civil society. Therefore, environmental protection movements have yet to be organized at a national level to achieve their goals. With a relatively weak environmentalist movement and government officials inexperienced in the field there is always danger that Western investments bring technologies to the area that are extremely destructive to the environment, even though it is a basic human right of the residents to live in a healthy, clean environment.

It is our wish and common interest that the development of the former Socialist countries bring with it change for the better in environmental conditions. This requires strict legal measures for the protection of the environment and the consistent enforcement of regulations on local, national and international levels at well. As phrased by the Congress on Environmental Protection in Rio, cities and local governments must play a key role in most urgent problems of environmental protection. This is especially true because cities have access to accurate information. This is where the needs of society for economic development and a cleaner environment are felt. This level has the means to solve problems closest to where they arise and when they arise with the cooperation of society.

This problem solving process using a prevention-oriented approach is a part of the so-called Third Generation of Local Environmental Management, under which both natural and human conditions and processes are understood, planned and managed in an integrated way.

In the third generation approach decisions would factor the carrying capacities of the ecosystem to prevent severe damage that may cause a break down in the system. The efficient use of resources would be supported and the methods of recycling the waste by-products of the system would be developed. A flexible and more adaptable infrastructure is required that is designed to reduce resource demands and to develop recycling.

The democratically elected Municipality of Budapest will be celebrating its second birthday in the next few days. By now the legal framework of our operation is more or less structured and we became aware of our obligations. We now also have some experience about the difficulties caused by the unreasonable distribution of competencies and responsibilities in dealing with environmental problems. Please allow me to say a few words about the special situation and difficulties of Budapest.

At the turn of the century Budapest was one of the most dynamically developing cities of the continent. Today the city is impoverished and run down, we must face problems that should have been dealt with decades ago. Still now we have to set down our priorities and ways to protect our environment.

The condition of Budapest's environment is now nearing a critical stage in spite of some recent developments in certain areas. Air and noise pollution in the city has reached unprecedented figures. The dumping of communal waste after 1995 is unresolved. The protection of existing and potential green areas is a daily struggle as housing construction, investment and enterprises try to expand over the still untouched areas. In the inside districts the aged public utility works are nearly incapable of serving rising demands, these districts concentrate one-fifth of the city's population and one-fourth of the industry. Intra-Hungarian and trans-European transit traffic crosses the center of the city of Budapest and the transportation network of the entire country causes large-scale pollution in the capital city.

In principal it is only natural that all members of healthy democratic society should feel responsible for their environment. In such an ideal situation all people would force themselves to refrain from damaging the environment. Unfortunately, this is only an ideal. Modern society itself performs certain activities that by nature cause harm to the environment. On the other hand environmental awareness is not at a high enough level. Developing an awareness is a process that will take many generations to complete, using all powers and resources of education. The role of self-organizing social movements is quite significant in that the actions of their volunteers draw attention to environmental problems and thus aid the development of a so-called eco-morality.

An important question in Central-Eastern Europe today is building civil initiatives into the formal power structure in a way so that they retain their independence and active capabilities in spite of the centralizing efforts of the ruling powers. The large-scale independence of Budapest district governments is aimed at raising the level of autonomy - which is a laudable goal from the point of view of democracy. This independence, however, is that which hinders the healthy working mechanisms of the capital city. There are always certain responsibilities in the life of a metropolis where the decentralization of authorities impedes the normal operation of the city.

The municipal system of Budapest is a two-level system. The relationship between the city and the individual districts is such that Municipality of Budapest is only considered the "twenty-third local government" of the city. Most of the environmental problems in the city cannot be solved at the district level, at the same time the municipality does not have the necessary authority. This two-level municipal system creates a special situation, neither the districts with their shrinking range of authority nor the city with her non-existent authority are able to develop or protect a healthy, human environment. At the same time the central government organs do not have access to the specifications necessary to assume responsibility in this field.

The city of Budapest has plenty of duties in order to create a healthy environment for the citizens but law does not provide all authorities promised enabling the Municipality to serve the demands of the city. The laws on local governments proclaimed has the protection of the built-in and natural environment is the responsibility of the Municipality of Budapest, delegating by the same taken the authority necessary to do the job to the districts.

The environment inspectorates operated by the central government and the definition of the local governments' rights was aimed at regulating activities threatening local environmental protection. Although the district local governments have the right to define higher air cleanness and noise reduction standards in the protected areas they do not have the power to enforce these. Local governments may only take action in the case of service-originated environmental damage, even though it is clear that the population suffers mostly not from these, but from the damage resulting of transportation and industrial activities, for which the central government organs are responsible.

The protection of green areas which do much to improve the quality of life in the city is also divided. The municipality has authority over larger parks, avenues and cemeteries while the districts have authority over other parks and public squares. Green areas with significant conditioning effect, however are not regulated by local authorities as these are registered as national defence areas or are connected to transportation areas. The situation is made even worse by the fact that licences for establishments on larger green areas and public squares are given by the local authorities in the area and the Municipality has no say in the matter. In addition to this limited budget of the districts makes it necessary that the districts try to finance development by "selling" existing and potential green areas. The most "fashionable" trade agreement is that the investor promises development in exchange for the chosen green area that the district would be unable to accomplish (such as parking garages).

Protection against rodents is also a district responsibility even though this would require a city-wide coordinated efforts as any actions on the part of individual districts at different times would be ineffective.

The municipality has no say in the licensing of construction that may cause problems in the entire city's environment, this is the authority of the district. In an industrial area even a nuclear reactor can be built upon the district's decision. At the same time investments that would serve the whole city might be torpedoed or impeded by the district, such as construction of a waste-burning plant, waste-water cleaning works or new waste-holding areas.

The city is in no better position with the possibility of planning and preventive environmental protection. The general settlement plan of the city is approved by the Municipal Congress while the detailed plan by the district representative bodies. In principal the detailed plan is developed from the general one but in actuality there are many differences. The districts, as individual local governments may work out their own plans according to their own conception of the district.

The setting-up of enterprises or firms is licensed by the districts or the inspectorates and it may happen that the possible environmental damage is caused in another district, in which case the Municipality has no way to take action, having no second-degree authority to revise decisions of the district or the inspectorates.

The problems listed illustrate the difficulties the local governments face when taking care of responsibilities described by law, which cause friction between the municipal governments and the central government organs. It is the duty of state government to describe the responsibilities of the municipal system and to provide the conditions of operation. It is our hope that the environmental protection law no being prepared will clarify

the duties of the local government, give special authority to the Municipality of Budapest and give the local governments a change to ensure a healthy human environment for the inhabitants of Budapest.