

Excellency, Madam Ambassador,

Many thanks for these kind words. I am very honoured to be made a Dame of the Hungarian State's Order of Merit, and not quite sure whether I merit it.

In terms of quantity, however, I should qualify, as my relationship with Hungary goes back almost 40 years. Communism's horrors define much of that. My first trip to Budapest was in 1981 when a student, partaking in the Salzburg seminar in Schloss Leopoldskron. From there I took the train to Budapest, a beautiful journey where however Hegyeshalom was a brutal break; German shepherds and tough guards searching the train and us. My co-traveller, another student, and I spend all the money we could on Kolbasz and Pick salami and still had a lot left, and pestered a poor Catholic priest in a church as to whether he was persecuted. I think he felt that if not before, certainly by these two nosy foreign girls. While there we had an appointment with a famous writer, Deszo Kerestury, and the combination of 30 degrees summer heat and palinka at his summer cottage resulted in profound political discussion and a page-length article in *Fædrelandsvennen* for which I wrote at the time.

Later in the 80s I would visit Pannonhalma, bringing forbidden literature by cardinal Mindszenty and Benediktiner-likeur to the abbot, p Norbert. He was a hero, standing up to communist brutality. I came to Győr by train, was clad in elegant *Loden*, and brought into the police station and interrogated: why was I going to Pannonhalma? What was I carrying? The gun was on the table in the room, typically painted in green with neon lights, like a poor movie. I learnt my first Hungarian word, *rendörseg*. The train station in Győr, by the way, is exactly like it was then even now. I was there that my husband hid when he fled in 1956, aided by one monk from Pannonhalma, p David Sjøveges, who was beaten severely by the police afterwards.

Arpad, my husband, went to their gymnasium thanks to abbot Norbert who gave him a free place despite his being designated the status of 'class enemy' in the Stalinist system of turning the nobility and *bourgeoise* upside down; their children would never be able to study and their parents were dispossessed and deported in internal exile, a fate that befell his family, too. For this reason Arpad never wanted to return to Hungary until it was free - which means in 1989.

Then we visited for the first time as a family, and it was amazing to meet family and friends of his that had endured the long, terrible years of Communist dictatorship. They rarely had anything in material terms, not having received an education or been allowed to hold a proper job, but their hospitality was total: never have I felt so welcome; never experienced such real Christian virtue. They could not baptize their children in their own villages, fearing informants, so they went to others. They kept their faith during all those long years where there was no hope, it seemed, of change. My father-in-law even died at the hand of police torture as late as in 1961 - they wanted him to be an informer. He was rehabilitated by the Antall government in 1990 and promoted to a four star general and is these days being exhumed in order to be buried in the new cemetery for Hungarian war heroes in Fiumi utca in Budapest. We hope to be able to be present then, all of us. This represents justice and

recognition for someone devoted to his duty to the nation of Hungary, at long last. Arpad tells me that his father said that there will be change, at some point, but he would not leave his country, as a good officer. There is an expression, in German '*in Ordnung sein*, to be morally upright. This is how one measured each other - and a good measure it is.

Today is the eve of the Hungarian revolution in 1956, so it seems very fit to recall the long winter of Soviet repression and tyranny and the many heroes of everyday life that silently bore the burden.

After 1990 our engagement with what has become my second homeland, blossomed. Academic cooperation, conferences, and when I was state secretary I was very happy to open the new Norwegian embassy in Ostrom utca in 1998 and to cooperate with several excellent Norwegian ambassadors to Hungary. Budapest is of course more like Paris than like Oslo; a majestic city on the river of breath-taking beauty and culture, and the intense cultural life of Hungary is very stimulating. The Hungarians take learning seriously, very much so; and they know their history, they are *connoisseurs* of music, and they are sophisticated about literature. This is European culture at its very best. I also cherish the sardonic humour and the direct communication: Hungarians do not shy away from confrontation and do not beat around the bush. When I first heard the language I thought they were angry; but it was just a nice chat. I have, alas, not learnt Hungarian; but our son Francis speaks it fluently after a semester of *szuper-intensiv* courses in Budapest.

Today I have a collaboration with the University in Koloszar (Cluj/Klausenburg) in Transylvania as part of a research group at the London School of Economics where I am an associate. It is amazing to experience really old Hungarian culture there; and we also found a mausoleum there for a relative who was pharmacist and senator. He came from what is today in Slovakia, wherefrom Arpad's family originates – actually Germans by the name of Maucks and Lutheran ministers many of them. One such wrote the family *Krønike* in 1794 and stated that some in the family drank too much and came to nought, whereas one pharmacist was 'ein durch Alchemie verdorbener Apotheker'. No political correctness here, thanks, also something typical of Hungarians.

Hungarians? Yes, but they are really multi-cultural and multi-religious - the nation in Hungary is associated with Calvinism and Lutheranism, of standing up to the Catholic Habsburgs. Religious freedom was for the first time made into law in 1588 in Transylvania at the Diet of Turda, then a Hungarian principality. Rights for Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Unitarians, Lutherans etc to worship side by side. And the multi-cultural nature of the region is vastly interesting; Germans, Hungarians, Rumanians, Serbs – this is real multi-culturalism. My husband's family was as said primarily German, but embraced Hungarian culture and language and made it their main one. But when the parents wanted to speak without children eaves-dropping, it was in German.

For Hungarians the concept of the nation is all-important in politics and culture. Language is one explanation; how to preserve it when it is a stranger surrounded by Slav languages? The nation is defined by the language, perhaps because the latter is so hard to master. Another is how to preserve the nation after centuries of invasion and repression – Ottoman threats

from the South, Russian from the East, Austrian from the West; and in modern times Nazi and Communist repression? These concerns are quite foreign in Northern Europe and Norway. Here we are not so very interested in history or preoccupied with the nation. One may like or dislike these differences – that is largely beside the point – but it is necessary to understand that Central Europeans are happy to be free to govern themselves after so many decades of repression. The nation and its continuity is therefore a predominant theme, as is preserving the 1000 years' of national Christian identity in countries such as Poland and Hungary.

Thank you for your attention!