

Contribution to the America-polemics

The article written by Eleni Tsakopoulos Kounalakis, US Ambassador to Hungary, in the columns of the Hungarian daily Magyar Nemzet, published on August 3, has become the source of considerable polemics. Concerning this, I would like to expose briefly the position of the Hungarian government.

With regard to the article itself I would first of all like express: we do not regard the piece as an intervention in the internal affairs of our country. Our style is not like that of Meciár or Fico. In diplomacy it is acceptable for an ambassador to expound in the press his or her personal views, or the position of his or her government related to current events in the receiving country. I would only remark that in this case it is just as acceptable and natural for publicists to react openly to these.

Furthermore, in her writing in question, the views stated by the Ambassador were in line with our ambitions, as our government also aims to consolidate democracy in our country durably after the legal and police abuses in the years between 2002 and 2010. And though we do so primarily based on our responsibility for the freedom of Hungarian citizens, we would also like to make everyone conscious, just as the Ambassador underlines, that in a way we serve as an example for the world. We also believe that having a two-thirds majority in the parliament does not only imply extra opportunities but also implies extra responsibilities, thus we intend to make use of this with special caution. Our views also coincide completely in that the two-thirds laws shall be formed with great care and on high professional level. It is good to know – and it is no problem at all if the public opinion is also conscious of this – that the United States has views that are identical with ours in these questions, and supports us.

We also agree with the remark made by the Ambassador that coming from our status as allies we shall “always continue an honest and open dialogue” with each other. This also involves, eventually, that she has interest in Hungarian domestic politics, insofar as she does this in the interest of the citizens of our country, and if she deems that calling attention to this or that affair may be of help to the government, which also acts in the interest of the citizens. Having interest in Hungarian affairs, otherwise, is not America specific, all diplomats accredited to Hungary are involved with this.

Just as well, it was also natural when it was us who called the attention of our allies to certain affairs. For example, when – also led by the concern for democracy but misperceiving the actors of Hungarian public life on the basis of false information – they expressed their sympathy for political forces which later on navigated our country into agreements which are contrary to transatlantic strategic interests. It is of common interest for such affairs not to take place again, just as we also consider it of common interest not to give support unintentionally, while intending to protect democracy, to the strengthening of extremist political groups, as that would definitely impede the accomplishment of our common goals – the strengthening of democracy in Hungary and its spreading worldwide.

I venture to declare that Eleni Tsakopoulos Kounalakis does everything possible in order to develop good Hungarian-American relations. One sign, evidence of this was her important

role in the success of the so-called Transatlantic Week. As far as we are concerned, I would like to make it clear that we consider bilateral diplomatic meetings successful, whatever way anyone may try to interpret them. However, it may also be helpful to underline that the Ambassador is probably not in an easy situation as the information on Hungary for many in Washington are solely based on the international press.

And here we have encountered a problem which has been accompanying the civic government for long. Since the regime change, certain western analysts have been convinced of a false assumption according to which, in our region, stability is ensured better by post-communist political formations than by political parties firmly supporting national interests. The principle of “let’s dare to be small” actually causes them less problems than a complex policy committed to national interests. This sequence of ideas, however, has consequences. Some people have still not understood, or perhaps still did not want to understand, that Gyurcsányism (after Ferenc Gyurcsány, former chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Party and former prime minister) was accompanied by a democratic deficit, implying a strong destabilization, and that this led to its fall. The reason for this, among others, is that intellectual circles close to Gyurcsányism – based on their network capital – continue to do everything to discredit Hungary abroad. Moreover, this is what is practically left for them, as (exactly because of their assistance to Gyurcsányism) they have become discredited and ineffective at home. Abroad, however, they may still succeed in having some people close their eyes to the fact that the ruling powers, on October 23, 2006, instructed the police into a crowd participating at a commemorative meeting organized by a democratic parliamentary party. Or to that LMP (Politics Can Be Different) practically raises the possibility of tactical election cooperation with Jobbik (The Movement for a Better Hungary), only to be able to corner Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Union) and KDNP (Christian Democratic People’s Party), while Jobbik is openly anti-Semitic in the parliament and intends to increase its votes with anti-Gypsy, racist rhetoric. It is perfectly clear that this is yet another case of a double standard.

Returning to the question of bilateral relations, I would again like to make it unmistakably clear: the alliance between Hungary and the United States is value based. This has been confirmed both by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The Hungarian government is an Atlanticist government. This is also why we are present with soldiers in Afghanistan, this is why we take part in peacekeeping in Kosovo (again becoming more complicated), this is why we give help to our allies by way of our embassy in Tripoli, and this is why we contribute to the spreading of human rights by way of the Lantos Institute. And finally, last but not least, we are Atlanticists because this is how Hungarian national interests can be enforced most efficiently, which is also the interest of Hungarian citizens. I would like to assure everyone that the Embassy of the United States in Budapest is our partner in our efforts aimed at this.

Zsolt Németh
Deputy Foreign Minister