

Opening speech of Gordon Bajnai in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

(Danube Strategy Conference of the European Commission, 25th February 2010)

Please, let me express my sincere thanks to the President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Academy itself that we can organize this event in such a location that is perhaps the most appropriate for the spirit of this event.

The building, in which we are, is a symbol. The Academy is the cathedral of the creating mind and the sign of the unity of the intellectual production. It is a worthy location for the present-day discussion as the Danube Strategy of the European Union has to symbolize the union of the spirit and the action and these two things have to be our joint guiding principles.

If the windows were not so high, you could look out of the window and see the Danube flowing a few meters away. The Danube flows irresistible from North to South and you may not believe that this huge river originates from the connection of two little creeks. Due to the junction of these two creeks, the Brigach and the Breg, Europe's nations got a direction for their migration in the ancient times. Later it enabled the establishment of the Danube empires. There were not only goods transported on the Danube, but also the European civilization, the various cultures joined and blended each other.

The river became the new strength of Europe after the enlargement of the European Union, but it had functioned before as a background dividing nations and as a limit. The Danube was a linking factor and sometimes a disjunctive factor in the various ages in the history of Europe.

The traces of the dividing function can be seen even now. This is the reason behind organizing this conference, and that is why the needs of the European Danube Strategy is to achieve that Danube becomes the symbol of what it had always been and we appreciate it and respect it to join our millennium long cultures.

Europe, European countries and the Danube are expected more than ever to provide a steady connection without seams.

Hungary therefore does undertake with pleasure because of its special situation to be the host of one of the most significant projects of the Danube Strategy as the development of cross-border traffic infrastructure and public transport as one of the leading projects of it. Hungary fulfills this task with other countries.

We consider the environment-friendly sailing and the intermodal transportation modernized with information technology a significant task in this strategy as well as the further building of the railway in the Danube Valley.

These are strategic tasks in accomplishing the potentials hidden in the Danube.

Just ten years ago, Tisza, one of the sister rivers of Danube, was suffering from one of its most serious tragedy, cyanic pollution. This has to remind us that the quality of the drinking-water is highly important in the Danube Strategy, that is the reason why Danube National Conference had to highlight the priority of this question. This is not only a Hungarian issue. I think, everybody connecting and clinging to the Danube has to be concerned by this issue.

Distinguished Attendees!

Among the important objectives of today's organization is to carry on the cooperation along the Danube, to discuss the cultural and identical context and the operations improving human relations. The Danube is not only a river, but also a logistic opportunity, not only an economic but also a cultural and scientific tie. It is therefore a great pleasure for me that as I was informed by the rector of Lőránd Eötvös University, the 50 universities of the Danube region had come to an agreement in the form of a common declaration that they will further develop the 20 year old Danube cluster. It would be a great success to be able to generate another leading project of the Danube Strategy. I suggest this principle should also be inserted in the Danube Strategy together with the European Commission.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The aim of this conference is to look for the fields of cooperation. We not only need a map of the Danube, but also a strategy-map across the Danube. We have to estimate and review the economic and social demands. This is the reason why this discussion needs to be continued now in Budapest among governmental representatives or representatives of the European Union and business, academic, local governmental and civil partners of the region.

Our cooperation can multiply our strength. There is no successful Danube strategy without the active and creative role of non-governmental civil participants. As the creeks Brigach and Breg multiplied their power and took a new shape in the form of river Danube at that time, we have to turn the Danube region into one of the most powerful and most competitive regions of Europe with the harmonization and coordination of partial interests and opening of new resources. All this will contribute to the establishment of a more dynamic, quickly developing Europe.

Our country has a special responsibility for drawing up the Strategy of the Danube Region. As it was mentioned by Commissioner Johannes Hahn, the strategy will be passed during the Hungarian EU-Presidency in the first half of 2011. That is why this conference is so important and I am glad to be able to open it.

I am convinced that this two day long conference will result in proposals of cooperation enriched with extended project objectives.

I wish you will have enough power to carry out what Attila József, one of the greatest representatives of the Hungarian poets, composed –I have to apologize to the interpreters –
'In the Danube's waves past, present and future
Are all-embracing in a soft caress.
The great battle which our ancestors once fought
Resolves into peace through the memories,
And to settle at last our communal affairs
Remains our task and none too small it is.' (translated by John Székely)

In the spirit of this, I wish you successful, effective work.

Thank you for your kind attention!