

OFFICE OF THE HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR FUTURE
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UK ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ASSOCIATION

PRESS RELEASE

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Hungary's Green Ombudsman puts environmental futures at the heart of decision-making

A unique environmental watchdog role – protecting the rights not just of present generations but also future ones – will be explained tonight (25th February) at the Ministry of Justice in London.

What lessons can the UK learn from the role of the Hungarian Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations, Dr Sándor Fülöp? Should we be considering a similar role to protect the interests of the most excluded – those who are yet to be born?

In 2007, the Hungarian Parliament created a new independent watchdog - the 'green ombudsman' - to safeguard the constitutional right of Hungarian citizens to a healthy environment.

In his speech tonight to an invited audience of lawyers, non-governmental organisations, academics and civil servants, Dr Fülöp will focus on lessons learned from his first year and a half in office:

"Since it began its work, my office has received more than 1000 complaints; most of them concerning local and regional environmental problems. I and my staff have participated in legislative consultations on over 50 draft legal acts. And we have taken part in or organised more than 200 conferences, stakeholder or scientific meetings.

We have found that these activities place the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations in a unique position to map Hungary's most topical environmental problems."

FDSD Director Halina Ward, who has co-organised tonight's event, adds:

"We all know that electoral cycles can drive short-term thinking at the expense of long-term vision. And short-termism can hamper the efforts of our elected leaders to take bold steps to protect the environment and secure a high quality of life for future generations.

Hungary's Green Ombudsman approach is one way to help secure that elusive mix of political leadership, expertise, citizen responsibility and grass-roots mobilisation on the key environmental and social issues of our time. We need to think about what we can take from that, and what more might be needed here in the UK."

Peter Kellett, Chair of UKELA, also a co-organiser of the event, says:

"There are still major challenges in environmental regulation and enforcement here in the UK. We have in many ways been progressive in designing and championing environmental laws and in enabling their enforcement through the Courts, but we have much to learn from our neighbours.

I am delighted that UKELA members have this opportunity to reflect on insights from a major Central European country, Hungary, whose constitution guarantees the right of its citizens to a clean and healthy environment"

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Note to editors:

The Green Ombudsman Dr Sándor Fülöp, and FSDS Director Halina Ward are available for media interviews and comment. Press enquiries: press@fbsd.org. Telephone: +44 (0)7825 164996.

In May 2008 the Hungarian Parliament elected environment lawyer, academic and former public prosecutor Dr Sándor Fülöp to become Hungary's first Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations for a six-year term. The Commissioner for Future Generations is one of four Parliamentary Ombudsmen, with others addressing civil rights, data protection and freedom of information, and the rights of 'national and ethnic minorities,' respectively.

The UK already has an Information Commissioner (dealing with data protection and freedom of information) and four Children's Commissioners (working to promote the views and best interests of all children and young people). But there is no direct equivalent of the Commissioner for Future Generations.

The **Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development** (www.fbsd.org) is a UK-based charity founded in 1983. FSDS's mission is to develop resources to equip democracy to deliver sustainable development.

The **UK Environmental Law Association** (www.ukela.org.uk) aims to make the law work for a better environment and to improve understanding and awareness of environmental law.

Dr Sándor Fülöp has degrees in law and in psychology. Between 1984 and 1991 he has worked as a public prosecutor at the Metropolitan and the National Chief Prosecutor's Office. He also served, until his election as Commissioner, as the director of Hungary's principal non-profit environmental law firm: the Environmental Management and Law Association (EMLA). In this capacity, Dr Fülöp participated in the drafting of the 1998 UN ECE Convention on Access to Information, Access to Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention). Between 2002 and 2008 he was a member of its Compliance Committee. Dr Fülöp has also been a university lecturer in environmental law since 1997

Halina Ward is Director of the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development. Before joining FSDS, she was Director of the Business and Sustainable Development Programme at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London. She has also worked as a Senior Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and as a solicitor practising commercial environment law.

Peter Kellett chairs the UK Environmental Law Association. He works in the Environment Agency for a team that seeks to improve environmental regulation.