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A BUDAPEST MEETING OF EUROPEAN MAYORS

by

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The Budapest Municipal Council invited the mayors and burgomasters of the capital cities of Europe to a conference arranged on the occasion of the centenary of the union of Buda, Pest and Óbuda. Between September 26 and 29, 1972 they discussed common problems and plans of urban development.

Zoltán Szépvölgyi, the Chairman of the Budapest Municipal Council gave the opening address, a slightly shortened version of which is here published.

COOPERATION BETWEEN CAPITALS

The capitals of European countries, throughout their history were always centres of social and economic development, of scientific and technical progress, and of culture. In the course of the centuries, invaluable treasures were accumulated in these towns and they are important centres of intellectual life, industry, commerce, and political activity. The metropolitan form of life developed first and foremost in the capitals, with all their problems and the efforts to solve them.

It logically follows that—although every metropolis has its own unique and specific image—there are also many similarities. They have to solve many similar tasks in order to create favourable conditions for the work and recreation of the inhabitants; they have to fight the same problems to let the advantages of metropolitan life come out and to reduce the hazards of urbanization. It is in the basic and common interest of these cities to develop and protect their accumulated wealth under peaceful conditions, and to ensure a steady improvement, and a more meaningful and humane life for millions of inhabitants.

This corresponds to the spirit of the United Nations Charter, which says that the UN will contribute "to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations

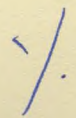
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among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples." Effective cooperation between the capitals of Europe can further the implementation of the aims, outlined in the Charter. The more frequent meeting of those in charge at conferences on urbanization, study tours, exchange of information, coordinated research on vital issues and the drawing of joint conclusions are all important. All this would bring those in charge closer to each other although they work under different conditions and circumstances, and would make contact between the inhabitants more lively. The social processes going on in Europe, the efforts made to get acquainted with each other (which are indicated also by the rapid expansion of tourism) all act as stimuli to a certain extent. This intention is mutually strengthened and no doubt it can have a direct effect on peaceful coexistence on our continent. It can consolidate peace and security in Europe. For our capitals are not only metropolises, but also administrative seats. As the consequence of their status, economic and cultural guiding role, financial power, possibilities and obligations, they can exercise considerable influence, not only on the solution of national problems, but also on the development of the international situation.

Let me emphasize, on behalf of the Budapest City Council, that we consider the cooperation of European capitals extremely important including the personal meetings of those in charge and the exchange of opinion among them. We consider this meeting an incentive, which is in harmony with the interests of the inhabitants of these capitals and with the endeavours for peace and security of the nations of Europe.

Without trying to cover the whole subject or to limit the mutual exchange of experience, I want to outline a few topics and problems which are, in my view, of common interest. It is my conviction that while exchanging experiences we can contribute to their solution, or at least take a step forward in this direction.

1) *Protection of the environment.* The harmful effect of various human activities on the natural environment is not new. There is no doubt, however, that the increased volume of industrial production, new industries and technologies, the growth of transport, and last but not least, the unparalleled increase in the number of urban dwellers produces an acute threat to the biosphere, and the whole ecological balance is in danger of being upset. Those in charge of European capitals are well aware of air pollution, and that of water and the soil, as well as noise. The adaptation ability of mankind can hardly keep up with the rapid changes in the environment. We are getting away from our natural surroundings to which we successfully adapted in the course of thousands of years. The rapid



tempo of metropolitan life, the connected stress effects, and the harm caused by noise, etc., attack our health, and our nervous system, weaken our resistance and ultimately endanger the biological survival of the race.

The environmental policies of recent years—despite increasing difficulties—allow the basic conditions of a bearable environment to be maintained or created for the majority of the inhabitants in most European capitals.

However, satisfactory solutions can only be attained by international cooperation that extends to every field of ecology.

2) *Historic towns and modern development.* All the European capitals, including Budapest, have a historic core that reflects the past and has a considerable cultural and historic value. In most capitals, this historic core remained the town centre. As a rule, it is surrounded by high density dwellings, it cannot therefore be extended, or only if great difficulties are surmounted. In most cities apartments are turned into business or administrative premises so that the city, over-crowded during the day, is deserted at night. At the same time, an extension of the towns requires the construction of housing on a large scale. Multi-storied housing estates were built, as well as extensive suburbs, that satisfy the requirements of modern man, but as they reflect the signs of modern mass production and standardization, they are frequently monotonous, with no character at all, and do not fit into the profile of the town.

One of the most attractive and most important duties of urbanists is to protect the historic character of towns, their traditional values, and simultaneously to build new projects and satisfy the requirements of the inhabitants. The monuments of the past have to be integrated into the blood flow of the present, while giving them socially required new functions—and new housing estates have to be built in a way that harmoniously fits into the picture of the town as it developed in the course of history.

3) *Transport.* A number of problems in big cities are connected with the unparalleled recent increase in population. More accurately, they are due to the fact that urbanistic development could not keep pace with the rapid increase of the population. In 1800, none of the European capitals had a million inhabitants or more. By 1900, six cities—including five capitals—surpassed the one million mark. In 1970, the inhabitants of three—London, Moscow and Paris—numbered between five and ten million, and thirty-two European cities including fourteen capitals exceeded the million mark. The number of inhabitants in the areas surrounding large cities increased to an even more rapid extent and this was true in many cases, where the growth of the city slowed down or even stagnated.

The increase in the number of inhabitants, technical progress and especially the flood of motor vehicles, and the development of giant extensive agglomerations made transport—though not always to the same extent and in the same manner—the cardinal problem of urban life in almost every European capital.

Several surveys were carried out in recent years to prevent the complete breakdown of transport. Considerable efforts were made: in almost every capital much building is done to ease transport problems. Fly-overs are built. Road networks are being rebuilt in many places and a hierarchy of various grade motor ways, highways and roads is created. The parking of cars is a major problem, especially in the town centres. The only solution seems to me to be an improvement of public transport (underground railways, suburban express railways and buses) including cheaper fares.

4) *The town — for men and women.* I quoted the Charter of the United Nations earlier. Allow me to continue: “the United Nations shall promote:

- a. higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development;
- b. solutions of international economic, social, health and related problems and
- c. international cultural and educational cooperation”.

Those in charge of the European capitals—whether dealing with daily questions or with the large and comprehensive problem of urbanization—strive to serve the economic, social, health and cultural progress of the population. Their more effective cooperation would improve the life and well-being of the inhabitants of our towns, either directly or indirectly. A number of social questions, which are in the focus of interest in almost every European capital are important enough to be placed in the centre of discussion. For example:

- a) the situation, organization, achievements and problems of medical care;
- b) the situation of old people, care for elderly citizens;
- c) the useful and beneficial utilization of leisure, efforts made to increase, promote and satisfy the cultural demands of the population.

I have chosen only a few from a multitude of problems. These are complex questions that are difficult to solve, but useful initiatives can be taken and valuable results can be attained for all, if experiences gained in these important fields are compared.

BUDAPEST'S PRESENT AND FUTURE

I would like to add a few facts and figures, plans and ideas in Budapest concerning the topics I have touched on aiming not only to inform but also to start the interchange of experiences.

The size of a city. The increase in the number of inhabitants and the territorial extension of the agglomeration developing around the central core are, as I said, the source of many problems.

Opinions are divided on what should be the attitude of the town leadership with regard to these. According to some, an over-grown city is unhealthy and uneconomical: in large towns the lack of informal relationships exaggerates alienation, the stress effects of the environment become unbearable, and the development and maintenance of the metropolitan infrastructure is disproportionately expensive. According to an opposing faction, the development of metropolises is a necessary stage in human progress. Large towns, primarily the capitals, are such important bases of social, cultural and technical development that their further growth is unavoidable.

We are in favour of the "metropolitan form of life". Nonetheless we in this country try to slow down the growth of Budapest; since we want to further a more proportionate development of the whole country. It is a particular problem in Hungary that despite considerable development in recent decades, the urbanization of the countryside has not made much headway. As a result of our de-centralization policy, the growth of the capital and its surroundings slowed down. In the past year Hungarian towns grew twice as rapidly as the capital, and the regional centres—three times more quickly.

Protection of the environment. Industry concentrated in large towns is an important source of growth for these towns. At the same time, the presence of industry in our towns causes many problems. In order to combat industrial hazards, we first have to measure, using suitable instruments, air pollution by industrial plants, the harm done by noise and the contamination of water. Municipal authorities must have appropriate powers and financial means to do away with these harmful effects or, if this is not possible, to relocate these plants.

In order to obtain results, one has to define first exactly what effects are considered as damaging. A careful elaboration of related norms is indispensable. Much has been done in Budapest to eliminate, or at least to reduce, the damaging effects of industrial plants. This aim is also served by an industry relocation policy. Seriously damaging plants are moved into remote areas.

The achievements and shortcomings of environmental protection are closely connected with the operation of communal services which satisfy the basic requirements of town dwellers. It is well known that the increase in the number of urban inhabitants, and the growing water-consumption by industrial plants result in a higher exploitation of available water resources. A special commission of the UN indicated in the mid-1960's that, in the 1970's, suitable drinking water will be one of the raw materials most difficult to obtain. In Budapest at present, two thirds of the drinking water is obtained from bed-filtrated wells, and only one third has to be obtained through surface water removal. However, the increasing pollution of the Danube is a sign which has to be taken very seriously. If we cannot halt this process in time, then we shall have difficulties not only with surface removal, but the water of the wells along the banks will also become polluted.

The choice and utilisation of fuels is one of the main issues as regards air pollution. In Budapest as elsewhere liquid and gas fuel is given priority over solid fuel. A bye-law has been issued forbidding the use of solid fuel in the centre of the city and fixing a date by which gas heating has to be installed.

Monuments. Following the heavy destruction caused by the Second World War, we faced enormous tasks in saving the city's relics of historical importance. We had to protect the substance of hundreds of buildings of artistic value, and after carrying out the most urgent tasks we could start, following scholarly research, on restoration work. Such work is not limited to a single building, ensembles as a whole are preserved if possible.

The establishment of "district centres" will eventually remove some of the pressure from the historic city centre: it was decided to establish three district centres on the left bank and three on the right bank of the Danube. Each of them will supply 200,000 to 300,000 inhabitants with institutions, department stores, and entertainment, and simultaneously alleviate the burden placed on the city centre. Each of these centres will be directly connected with the historic city centre by the underground railway. Their establishment—one after the other—will take place parallel with the reconstruction of the outlying districts. A large part of required new office space will be constructed in these new district centres.

Housing. The solution of the housing problem is one of the most important tasks. The two million inhabitants of the city live in 630,000 flats (more than 18 per cent of these were built in the last ten years). This means an average 3.2 persons per flat, which in itself is not an unfavourable figure. But, if we aim to provide every adult who wishes to live on his own

and not only families with an independent home, then there is still a great shortage. In addition, there is the qualitative shortage, that is, size, location, and fittings are not always of the required standard. We aim to speed up buildings. Our aim is to build the largest possible number of dwellings in the shortest possible time. We have to overcome a shortage of labour, therefore it is especially important to deal with this problem, with as small a labour force as possible. Large housing estates are being built. One of our main endeavours is to make use of prefabricated element technologies, but at the same time, we have to ensure standards of appearance by the proper grouping and variation of the buildings, the location of institutions and shopping centres, and by providing parks at the same time as buildings. The construction of housing estates has achieved significant proportions especially in the past five years. Three factories are providing the building elements. Several housing estates are being constructed consisting of nearly 10,000 and in some cases of even more apartments, erected on open sites or on cleared sites after the demolition of outdated dwellings.

A planned economy, an essential part of our socialist social system, enables us to carry out a complex housing programme. With regard to the past, we protect and restore architectural monuments with loving care, but at the same time we demolish inherited slums replacing them with modern homes.

Traffic. Traffic problems are increasing in Budapest, even though—owing to the relatively small number of cars—the situation has not become as embarrassing as in the majority of West European capitals. Much has been learnt from the experience of other capitals. Taking them into consideration, and based on the long-term transport development plan, we endeavour to solve or eliminate transport problems which already exist, and will increase in the near future. The role of public transport must be given great importance, emphasis is therefore placed on its growth.

With regard to the density of the network of public transport vehicles, Budapest is in a favourable position. Fares are cheap. We introduced a differentiated monthly season ticket system, including tickets at reduced rates for young and retired people. In Budapest, the yearly journeys per capita are 840, which is among the highest in Europe. The problems are caused mainly by the lack of capacity, consequently public transport vehicles are over-crowded, and are thus slowed down.

Corresponding with the development of Budapest and the number of inhabitants, plus the number of passengers carried, the construction of a rapid transit system was started, which according to plan consists of three, mainly underground lines that cross diagonally under the city. In building

the new Metro, we were given useful advice and assistance by specialists from Moscow. The first, 11 kilometre long, diagonal line is partly in operation, and will be completed this year. The construction of the second line is also under way. I should like to note that the first underground railway on the European continent was built in Budapest in 1896 and is still in operation. The urban rapid transit system will be connected up with suburban surface rapid trains. According to plan, this network will be supplemented in the vicinity of the town by rapid train services of the State Railways wherever existing lines permit this. The role of buses and the still existing trams will be confined to carrying passengers to the appropriate points of the rapid train service. Today, however, the major part of the burden of public transport in Budapest devolves on buses and trams, and therefore considerable care is given to their development. The number of vehicles is constantly increased. Several years ago, we introduced large capacity articulated vehicles. It was decided to do without ticket collectors in order to speed up transport. Parallel with the existing bus lines, we organized express bus routes, on which vehicles only stop at the busiest points.

Public transport is being improved but a large-scale increase in the number of cars is nevertheless likely to take place. Plans include a motor ring-road, and the necessary outlets, the construction of which is already under way. The city's main road network was built in the second half of the 19th century, according to the town planning notions of the time. The relatively clearly arranged and clear-cut system makes it a suitable backbone for the traffic network, with occasional enlargements and the rebuilding of junctions. Construction work in this respect is constantly going on. Fly-overs and pedestrian underpasses are built at the approaches of bridges and at intersections. The widening of roads has partly been accomplished through demolition and partly through extending the pavement under buildings by constructing arcades. We plan to supplement our main road network by new roads. City reconstruction is taking place in such a manner that we ensure the necessary areas for new roads.

Although their solution is the task of specialists, the choice of desired trends of development comes under the authority of the representatives of inhabitants. I, therefore, consider a multilateral exchange of experience necessary in this sphere, too.

Health. Medical care in Budapest has achieved considerable results, especially in the field of out-patient treatment, the integration of curative-preventive care, in the organization of preventive medicine, and the care of elderly citizens. In the district medical service, which provides basic medical care,

facilities for children and adults have been separated. Children up to the age of 14 years are cared for by specialists, and there is roughly one paediatrician for every 1,000 children between 0 and 14 years.

It was recently decided that the district medical officers for the care of citizens over 14, when assigned must have post-graduate qualifications in internal medicine. 40 per cent of our district practitioners are specialists in internal medicine. There are clinics for adults in every district (one for every 80,000, where the daily number of patients is about 1,600 to 2,000), and there are children's clinics in every 3 to 4 districts, which provide specialized assistance to the basic district medical service.

Considerable results were achieved in recent years in the integration of ambulatory and bed-ridden patients' care. The hospitals supervise doctors who look after ambulatory patients and provide efficient assistance, both in the care of patients as well as post-graduate medical training.

Twenty-eight thousand hospital beds are available in Budapest with more than 9,000 physicians; 76.5 per cent of them are qualified as specialists.

Due to the growing efficiency of preventive medicine in the past twenty years the number of new tuberculosis cases dropped to one fifth of the earlier figure and the number of acute infectious diseases decreased by almost 80 per cent. Infantile mortality decreased by half. Thanks to compulsory inoculation polio was eliminated and the incidence of measles was minimized.

Due to the industrial health service organized since the Liberation, and the modernization of factory equipment, an 80 per cent reduction in time lost due to accidents and occupational illnesses has taken place in the past ten years.

Care for the elderly. Lonely elderly people are being cared for in various ways. Homes were established which provide food and entertainment and where the residents are cared for free of charge or for a nominal fee. In addition there are 22 district centres where 1,000 to 1,100 senior citizens are looked after during the day, and the network of territorial social workers and nurses is growing apace. They visit and look after elderly people in their own homes. There is considerable interest in the "Houses of Pensioners", which provide apartments for retired people and hotel-standard catering at cost, as well as medical care.

Cultural Life. I think it is unnecessary to quote figures to indicate that Budapest, the home of Bartók, Kodály, Lóránd Eötvös the great physicist, and Attila József the poet—to mention only the greatest—is still a lively centre of culture. Most Hungarian book publishing is concentrated here and so are the largest libraries including the Ervin Szabó Municipal

Library, which has a large number of branches throughout the city. Reading here is a "public matter". Budapest is, of course, also a scientific and educational centre. I do not want to go into details about the musical life of Budapest, the theatres and Hungarian film production, which are also concentrated in the capital. We consider it a socialist achievement that culture is not a commercial venture in Hungary. A defined part of the national income is spent on culture. Tickets for the opera, theatres, and concerts are inexpensive, as are also books. Culture is in this way made accessible to even those with modest incomes.

How can one in the age of mass media, when a multitude of factors affect the passive reception of entertainment provided by television, films, records, and tape recorders, ensure that the masses become active participants? The means are well known. A large number of cultural centres and clubs; entertainment and education for the young and not so young has been provided. But it is also well known how difficult it is and how much experimentation and sacrifice are needed to fill this framework with useful, valuable, and attractive meaning—not occasionally, but all the time and over a long period. We believe and urge that the "alienating" effect of urban life is not inevitable: it can be reduced and eliminated if urban residents develop local patriotism, nourished by a knowledge of the past, and by participation in present and future plans. It is worth mentioning that in our city the "local history movement" is extremely popular—tens of thousands of young and old people, men and women, study the historic documents of their immediate surroundings. Millions watched a contest of these local history groups on television. It was won by a district team, but the real winners were undoubtedly all the inhabitants of Budapest. Exhibitions displaying aspects of urban development serve this purpose. The population there becomes acquainted with the ideas of the leading experts.

Last but by no means least, I mention efforts made to link up the cultural life of Budapest with the current of European culture in a more complex and efficient way.

Budapest is one of the centres of European intellectual life, it is the venue of many international congresses and conferences. The best orchestras and theatrical companies of Europe regularly visit this city and museums lend their treasures for display here. It is perhaps not immodest to say that the 2.5 million visitors to Budapest in 1971 were largely attracted by the treasures of our cultural past and present. Even larger numbers gained access to Hungarian culture thanks to the tours of the Budapest State Concert Orchestra, the Philharmonic Orchestra, the Budapest State Opera

House Company as well as theatrical companies, the lectures by Hungarian scientists and writers, exhibitions by artists, and through Hungarian films, books, television and radio exchange programmes.

The Budapest Festival, organized every autumn, serves a great and noble aim, and its events are always the festive overture to the season. The events of this Budapest festival present the best creations of Hungarian music, theatre, films and fine arts to Hungarian audiences and visitors from abroad. At the same time, outstanding artists and ensembles come to Budapest from various countries, together with valuable exhibition materials. I am sure that cultural cooperation between the capitals of Europe is mutually advantageous and enriching.