Gábor Szényei's opening speech of DEMO DUO

Dear Teachers,

I am really sorry that due to my other activities I cannot personally attend the launch of the BIA's very important new educational program, DEMO DUO. At the same time, I feel it is my duty to point out why our foundation supports this program, which is a significant part of our budget.

In today's political communication (where there is a struggle for power to interpret phenomena), it is parenthetical as to why Christian democracy is called "Christian" and "democracy". I would like to expand on this with a few brief thoughts.

Hungarian political Catholicism's party is the Catholic People's Party. At the end of the 19th century, it was born of the conviction that it should protect the interests of its religious believers within the framework of a competitive political system. It also meant that this political group was no longer pro-restoration conservative and did not want to restore feudalism. True, it wanted to preserve the Church's political influence as much as possible, but ultimately accepted the civil aspirations of the separation of Church and state. That said, Count Nándor Zichy and his circle were not democrats. Within Catholicism in the twentieth century, closest to the values of democracy was Sándor Giesswein, Canon of Győr. He fought for social justice laws to ensure social justice, fought for universal, equal and secret suffrage and for women's political rights. He was a prominent leader of the First World War peace movement, and was regarded as the predecessor of the Christian democratic movement of the 1930's. Christian democracy in the present sense of the word was created by reformist Catholics of the 1930's. Standing on the "side of the people", they linked the ideas of political democracy and social justice. One of the members of the group was journalist István Barankovics who, on the death of Sándor Pethő, succeeded him as editor-in-chief of the oldest daily newspaper still in existence, the Magyar Nemzet. Barankovics was sought by the Germans, then by the Arrow Cross, for his brave democratic articles in the last years of the war. After 1945-46 he became increasingly "persona non grata" to the Communists. His party, the Democratic People's Party, became the strongest opposition party after the 1947 elections.

Why am I telling you all this? Because István Barankovics, the eponym of our Foundation, also recognized the importance of political culture's impact on the quality of the actual functioning of democracy. That is why, in his time, he also initiated (based on the American model) the establishment of a school of democracy.

After 1945, the eponymous István Barankovics and so many other fellow-men, saw a chance for Hungarian society to make a turn and for the millions who had been restricted to exercise their political rights take control of their destiny. The model of democracy in his mind was based on the idea of personalism, and the prerequisite of good social organization was the guarantee of human dignity. He repeatedly stated that democracy was "true self-government of the people", a form of co-existence based on the principle of subsidiarity. In order for this to work, he saw the need to raise political literacy and prepare people to exercise their political rights. Today, 30 years after the change of regime, a sense of political indifference and incompetence can still be detected in Hungarian political culture, and we feel that the tasks of shaping the mentality of public culture outlined by Barankovics are still relevant.

That is why we recently supported the development of the Online Democracy Activity educational social study competition (designed and operated for four years by Foundation staff) and now the DEMO DUO project, which is starting today as a pilot project and, if successful, is also planned for a longer term.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Barankovics István Foundation, we wish you innovative ideas, cooperative actors and success in your work:

Dr. András Gábor Szényei, Vice President