

ZSUZSA LUDVIG AS A RESEARCHER AND AS A PERSON

It was just after the Fall of Communism, in the midst of rampant Russophilia, when political considerations dominated over economic rationality. The billboards were full of posters with the slogan “tovarishi konec” during the electoral campaign. Politicians of the energy-importer Hungary did not care about the potential consequences of these messages on oil price negotiations with the Soviet Union. Practically nobody did care about the annual loss of 1.5 billion USD caused by switching to convertible currency in the Hungarian-Soviet trade – a move urged by Budapest. We relinquished the Russian market pretty easily. The dramatic collapse of the Russian economy, its liberalization during the shock therapy, and its integration into the world market was presented as a success by the Hungarian expertal community.

Exactly during these days a slim, young lady appeared at the Institute of World Economy, Zsuzsa Ludvig. Very soon, she established herself as a respectable researcher by her balanced, detached assessments. She was widely known not only at home, in Hungary but also among Russian academics, even at the famous IMEMO.

I had the privilege with other researchers to work with her on the study book, “Russia in the World Economy”, published in 2001 by Aula publisher. This book collected the most important studies of a research project under her supervision. The project attempted to identify and describe the most important facts, trends and drivers of the Russian economy in the second half of the ‘90ies. Analyzing the most significant interrelations of Russian foreign trade, Zsuzsa brilliantly pointed to the domestic expertal and political misperceptions and impropriety regarding Russia. As she summarized her findings: “The thorough examination of foreign trade as the main element of economic reform or its driver raised many problems... Pushing export when sources are scarce automatically results in the realignment of resources partially at the expense of domestic production, partially by de-emphasizing particular economic sectors... The evolving import structure has also very serious, harmful effects on domestic economy. The robust advance of foreign suppliers on the markets of food and consumer goods is hardly irreversible, squeezing domestic producers. Despite all governmental efforts, this trend threatens their chances for development or even survival.”

She also pointed to the degradation of export structure by the domination of raw materials, the unfavorable ecological consequences, the growing regional differences

etc. Her conclusions were the following: “The situation that proves to be dark even today, will become much more alarming if we consider, that despite of “taking all these problems upon herself” Russia has been losing its share in global trade.” (Page 115-117.)

Despite all our differences in academic approaches, her independent professional attitude, readiness to resist mainstream influences, put Zsuzsa Ludvig on an academic pedestal in my eyes already in the 90’s.

She managed to set her conclusions on a consistent, factual and statistical basis without niggling or entering too much into unnecessary details. She was skillful in pointing to the substance and presenting the most important interrelations in a concise way. These are very important researcher’s virtues. As a research leader she also inspired her colleagues to work in a similar manner.

By the 2000s, Zsuzsi set herself as a respectable, renowned expert in Russian economic studies in Eastern Europe. She became participant and organizer of many international programs. Her field of interest included the integration processes of Post Soviet region and some of its major countries, the global trends in Euro-Asia, the economic relations of European Union and Russia, and the last two decades of Hungarian-Russian relations. She analyzed each research issues in a broad context, taking into consideration the effects of global factors and processes among others. The latter was especially important in the course of analyzing the above mentioned international integration processes.

Zsuzsi was an extremely calm, modest, peaceful and kind colleague. Nonetheless, she argued clearly and honestly with great conviction whether at scientific speeches or at private discussions. We knew that she was living a deep spiritual life in a community and she had a wonderful family. She was often speaking about her children and I talked to her about my grandchildren.

Fate sometimes is very unfair!

Peter Farkas