

Dr. Heinz Fischer

Mr. Minister, state secretary, Professor Hordijk, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. State Secretary Winkler just has told us that he was a very young diplomat the beginning of the seventies working on the legal basis for foundation of IIASA in Austria. At the same time I was young member of parliament, and I remember the work on the piece of legislation which finally was the basis for these activities and for this achievement. So we have good memories and I think we share these memories with many others in Austria who were happy 35 years—and are still happy—that IIASA is based in this country.

Some years later, in 1976, Austria's federal chancellor Bruno Kreisky opened a congress organized by IIASA and Kreisky's speech was later published in a two volume collection of his addresses and speeches. This indicates that the editors of Kreisky's speeches attributed some importance to his message, but much of what he said in this speech did not directly concern the mission and activities of IIASA but, interestingly enough, dealt with his personal impressions regarding the launching of Sputnik almost 20 years earlier in 1957. The persistent fascination that Sputnik elicited then, and still does today, is probably due to the fact that the first man-made satellite made people all over the world aware of the virtually boundless capabilities of the human mind. Humankind have embarked on its voyage into space, into the universe. And Sputnik was launched only two years after the conclusion of the Austrian state treaty by which Austria regained her full sovereignty and our country's commitment to permanent neutrality that established its position between the power blocs of East and West. Probably it was this special constellation, scientific and technological arms race, and Austria's commitment to neutrality that gave support in the early 70s to the idea to meet the need for international scientific cooperation crossing the borders between East and West. This decision was realized by establishing here in Austria—as was already mentioned and you already know—an institute that would allow scientists from many different countries to engage in research activities, irrespective of the original political orientation of their home countries.

The 35 years that have elapsed since the founding of IIASA have seen a fundamental change in the political map of our world, especially the year 1989. The fall of the iron curtain in Europe fundamentally changed the political landscape and therefore also the possibilities of scientific cooperation worldwide. In line with the new situation, the countries participating in the work of IIASA have to a certain degree also changed. While at the outset their orientation was East–West, in accordance with the political map of the world, the last few years have seen the reorientation along the North–South axis. The active participation of major countries in IIASA still continues to be of the utmost importance, and it is to be hoped, and I underline what Minister Hahn just has said, that some of the founding members who no longer take a share in its activities such as France and Italy can be persuaded to come back on board.

Ladies and gentlemen, what has survived these dramatic political changes, however, is the urgent need for international cooperation. Indeed the challenges confronting our

societies and countries have increasingly assumed global proportions and can no longer be successfully met only on the national scale. In many fields, global cooperation has become a matter of truly vital importance. And there is yet another aspect that merits our attention. Research and development have now attained a level at which scientific issues are inseparably linked with political ones. Let us look at one very recent example. The deciphering of the human genome. A few months ago the American scientist Craig Venter deciphered his own genome and in doing so discovered his congenital inclination to heart disease. If we extrapolate from this example into the future, the question is how society will react 20 or 30 years from now to our ability to detect an individual's propensity to develop a certain disease in later years. How, for instance, will our health system respond? Will health insurance premiums to be determined on the basis of a person's genetic make-up? What will our society do once it has developed ways to detect genes that make an individual aggressive and violent? Questions that appeared to belong to the realm of science fiction only a few years ago are now being widely discussed by experts who base their arguments on scientific findings.

Or take climate change. A short while ago it was still possible to downplay such phenomena as global warming or global change. Today the fact that these problems are manmade is almost universally accepted; however, answers will yet have to be found to such questions as how it is possible and by what means we can halve, for instance, in Europe, the per capita output of CO₂.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I outline briefly these problems for you I certainly do not intend to lecture on matters that are part and parcel of your work every day. Nor do I venture to carry, as we say in Vienna, water into the Danube. What I want to highlight is the extraordinarily high degree to which scientific research and politics are intertwined. Amongst others, Jürgen Habermas has recently demonstrated convincingly that there is no such thing as disinterested knowledge, and that all scientific research is interest-driven. This has tremendous consequences insofar as it makes social responsibility an indispensable and integral part of scientific work. In the case of IIASA this understanding has caused the institution to explicitly make the political relevance of its work an essential prerequisite for its scientific activities.

Ladies and gentlemen, its thanks to this position that IIASA has for the past 35 years been a globally important partner to governmental and supranational institutions. I would just like to take this opportunity not only to congratulate IIASA most sincerely on its achievements, but also to thank all its staff for their untiring and successful work. Please remember that your research is becoming more and more important every day and that your search for answers is contributing most significantly to the development of humankind. Once again, my congratulations and my best wishes for a really successful future. Thank you.