

The Budapest representative of Sao Tome and Principe

- dr. István Fodros, honorary consul

Sao Tome and Principe is a state situated in the Gulf of Guinea to the north of the Equator, on two volcanic islands. The area was first discovered in 1471 by Portuguese sailors and was a Portuguese colony for centuries. It gained its independence in 1975. Sao Tome is situated thousands of kilometres from Hungary. Although it is not a primary destination for tourists, many people still think that this is what makes it exciting. If anyone feels like travelling there, they should visit the consul's office in Hungary where the president and chief editor of Diplomata magazine dr. István Fodros, honorary consul will help them find the best solution.

"How did you become honorary consul of Sao Tome and Principe?"

"I gave a lecture at a conference in South Africa, and in my lecture I referred to a Russian professor in connection with a certain scientific article. After my lecture an African gentleman came up to me and asked whether I knew the professor in person. I told him that the professor used to teach me at the International Diplomatic Academy in Moscow. It turned out that the African gentleman had also attended the same Academy, and the professor had taught him too. Due to our "common past" we spoke at length several times, and eventually it turned out that he was Minister of Foreign Affairs in Sao Tome."

"So from then on it was a clear way to Sao Tome?"

"In Europe they have only two embassies and two honorary consuls. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, who became a good friend of mine later on, asked me whether I would undertake this position. I was happy to say yes, but the way there was not completely clear, because the invitation was followed by a two-year legal procedure. Finally in 2003 I received my appointment; the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Republic issued a licence for operation and gave his consent for me as honorary consul to the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe to act as consul with respect to the whole territory of the Hungarian Republic, with my headquarters in Budapest."

"What tasks does this position involve?"

"It is very interesting, because many people think that in Hungary we must represent the interests of Hungarians, but it is not like that. The honorary consul receives instructions regarding his activities from the delegating country. So in Hungary I represent Sao Tome and its citizens. It means that if a citizen of my country needs help, it is my obligation to find a solution for the problem. It is very important to establish new relationships between the two countries. We are surveying the possibilities taking into consideration our mutual interests, first of all the interests of my delegating country."

"Is it true that Sao Tome is one of the poorest countries in the world where there have been civil conflicts?"

"It is true, but the situation can change now that they found oil under the island. They found such a huge amount of unexploited reserves, which gives Sao Tome and Principe a chance to become a significant oil-producing country by 2008."

There was a conflict and a recent unsuccessful putsch. Now the country is at peace and harmony."

"As it is a poor country, it would be interesting to mention some economic figures. The fact that oil has been found may change these values."

"Presently the country produces cocoa, coffee and coconuts. The majority of the 181,500 inhabitants live from plant cultivation, the tropical climate and the volcanic soil provide favourable conditions for plantation farming. In 2003 the country's export amounted to 6.45 million dollars, while its imports amounted to 30 million dollars, the rate of inflation was 9%."

"How can Sao Tome represent itself effectively, how can it assert its presence in the world when its possibilities are so restricted? How can they assert themselves under such circumstances?"

"Sao Tome is a member of the UN and nearly all international organisations. It has no connections with Hungary apart from a diplomatic relationship. There is no ambassador officially accredited to Hungary, which is a difficulty, because the most direct and the only official diplomatic connection between the two countries is us, this consulate."

"The Hungarian consulate has just received the right to issue visas, and its activity has been extended to Central and Eastern Europe. Has the Hungarian consulate become a base?"

"We are in a special position, because a general consulate operates in Hungary headed by the honorary consul. We have the same power as any other representative office, but the honorary consul does not have such wide possibilities as a commis-

sioned consul. Now that visas can be issued a great gap has been filled in, because so far in Europe such documents could only be issued in Brussels or Lisbon. Now applicants can receive visas here too. At the time of this interview Horácio da Fonseca Purvis, our ambassador in Brussels is staying in Hungary, who helps us a lot in operating our consulate. This time again he has come to review the situation and initiate the conversion of the consulate into a consulate general."



Pálfalvi Hilda (a feleség) Bogrogi Gyula és Vass Angéla (Bodrogi partnere) társaságában

"Beside being an honorary consul you are also president and chief editor of the Diplomatic Magazine. What advantages does this double position have?"

"As president and chief director of the magazine I cultivate excellent connections with the foreign representative offices in my country. Obviously the two functions cannot be separated from each other, and I make use of every opportunity to make the little country I represent more widely known."

"Besides your diplomatic work and running the magazine what can we know of your private life? How do you rest from your everyday duties?"

My family is very important for me; my wife, who is a lawyer, my daughter Krisztina and my three-year-old granddaughter. As for my free time? When I do have the time I like to go hunting with my friends, which is no longer just a hobby, it has become my passion.

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