

*Exclusive Radio Havana Cuba
interview with the Honorable
Péter Szijjártó, Minister of
Foreign Affairs of Hungary*

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Conducted on Wednesday, January 18th, by Roberto Bastidas of RHC's English-language Department.

Journalist Roberto Bastidas: We have the pleasure to have on our program the Honorable Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary. First, I would like to thank you for taking the time to talk with us here on Radio Havana Cuba. As you probably know, we are the international radio station broadcasting a number of languages, both on shortwave and streaming audio on the Internet. And it is an honor to interview you here in our English language transmission heard around the world.

Péter Szijjártó: Thank you so much for the invitation. I'm so glad to be here.

Roberto Bastidas: I remind our listeners that last year, in 2022, we celebrated 60 years of interrupted diplomatic relations between Cuba and your country, Hungary. And I would like to begin by asking you about the bilateral relations between our two countries in general. And what do you think are the possibilities of Hungary investing in Cuba, and from your perspective, what does the future look like for more enhanced trade between Havana and Budapest? And also, you recently talked with our president, Miguel Diaz Canel, what can you tell us about that?

Péter Szijjártó: Well, first of all, it's my pleasure to be back. The first time I visited your country was back in 2017. I'm happy to serve together with your Foreign Minister in international relations. It's very unique that we can serve together for such a long time, which gives us the pleasure of knowing each other and having a reliable partnership. Our bilateral relationship is based on mutual respect. So when we come together, we avoid discussing domestic issues with each other, because this is not our job. We avoid lecturing or judging each other, because this is far away of our approach. We usually speak about how we can bring benefit to both nations through our cooperation. Well, we have an extended cooperation in the field of education, which is very important. Each year, there are ten Cuban students to whom the Hungarian government gives a state-financed scholarship at Hungarian universities. This year, there were 32 applications submitted, which is great. We have a long list of Hungarian universities having cooperation with universities here in Cuba, mostly on the field of agriculture, life science, and in the fields of other scientific areas. Now, we would like to extend this cooperation towards medical science and pharmaceutical science, given the fact that in the last recent decades, Cuba was and is famous about the level of standards of medical science and the development is really remarkable.

So we would like to see the cooperation extended to this area. And we also understand that the highly developed Hungarian food processing industry can have a good market here in Cuba when it comes to poultry, when it comes to pork, when it comes to processing of all these meat products, we are looking for the opportunities here. And also in the field of water management, we have highly developed technologies. We all know that the natural catastrophes have been hitting Cuba and it has consequences in the field of water treatment. And in this area, we can be helpful. We have already sent some water purification containers after the last hurricane, which caused a lot of trouble here, and we also sent medical equipment when you had to improve your fight against the COVID and the consequences of that. So the relationship is absolutely without any kind of open political issues. This is a mutually respectful relationship and this gives us a chance to further extend that in the areas I listed for you.

Well, that was my honor that your president received me, obviously, and he talked to me a lot about the impact of the blockade of the United States against Cuba, the impact of this blockade on the people here.

I felt a bit the impact of the blockade as well, because some fueling companies refused to refuel our airplane in Dublin as we were flying here. Although it's an aircraft owned by the Hungarian Air Force and it is clearly a diplomatic trip. After a two hour long paperwork and a series of phone conversations, we were allowed to be refueled and start our journey here.

So, generally speaking, we Hungarians do believe that international politics should return to the basis of mutual respect, dialogue and talking to each other. Now, what we see is that international politics is mostly based on judging, lecturing, criticizing each other, blockades, sanctions. And to be honest, maybe I'm not right, but this is how I see I cannot recall any policy based on blockades or sanctions which prove to be successful. So I hope, as a representative of a small landlocked central European country somewhere between east and west, geographically speaking, that international politics will return to the field of mutual respect, conversation, dialogue, instead of sanctions and blockades. I have made it very clear to your president as well. We are a country, we are a nation which is very proud of its sovereignty and independence.

We cannot stand external interference, although there are attempts on a continuous basis. It just turned out that very recently, in our last national elections, the opposition was heavily financed from sources in the United States. So we all know that the international pressure can be there on some countries, but at the end of the day, our job as politicians is to satisfy our own voters and not external actors.

Roberto Bastidas: What is your opinion about unjust inclusion of Cuba on the U.S. list of so called sponsors of terrorism?

Péter Szijjártó: Look, I told your president that before our elections in 2018, a couple of weeks before that, there was an initiative to put Hungary on the FATF list of money laundering and financing terrorism as well. And to be honest, I mean, it's ridiculous. So we have a very simple approach to these international lists, to these international reports that these are usually biased, these are usually very unbalanced, and these are usually politically motivated. We have a lot of debate with international organizations as well. And we as a government which definitely goes against the international liberal mainstream, we feel that international organizations, international reports, international lists are being used by big and strong powers as political tools. Actually, we cannot help it, but we should not frustrate ourselves. We just have to be aware that these kind of reports are very rarely being based on real facts.

Roberto Bastidas: Can you tell our listeners about the position of your government concerning the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and especially the threat of the expansion of the NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the region?

Péter Szijjártó: Look, we are a neighboring country to Ukraine so the impacts of the war have been very severe and very immediate on us. Imagine, we have received already more than a million refugees from Ukraine. For those who stay, we ensure, of course, equal access to health care and education. There are more than 1,300 schools and kindergartens which have already enrolled refugee kids and students. We give incentive to the employers to employ refugees. We have been carrying out the largest humanitarian operation ever in our history in order to help the Ukrainian refugees. On the other hand, as a neighboring country to another country which is in war, there's a very clear security hazard, a security risk which we shouldn't want to be there for a long time.

Not to speak about the other impacts on energy prices. Imagine our national energy bill has increased from ?7 billion to ?17 billion in one year. So this means that there's a ?10 billion of extra expenditure for nothing basically which could have been spent on further supporting the families, further creating new jobs, developing the infrastructure in the country. The impacts of the war are very negative, very severe and very immediate. That's why we are a country very interested that peace comes as soon as possible. That's why we urge international community to take steps towards peace. We do believe that without keeping communication, channels open with each other, it's not possible to create peace. We hope that the war comes to end soon, but, rationally speaking, I think that this hope is more like a dream.

Roberto Bastidas: Thank you so much, sir, for taking the time to be with us today.

Péter Szijjártó: Thank you for the invitaton. We wish all the best for the Cuban people.

NOTE> You can listen to the audio of this interview by going to the link:
<https://teveo.cu/media/kSAYDSABEDGYEsgh>

[Radio Habana Cuba \(English\)](#)

On a new edition of "Be My Guest," Roberto Bastidas presents an exclusive interview with the Foreign Minister of Hungary, Péter Szijjártó, who is on an official visit to Cuba. They talk about the excellent relations between Havana and Budapest, as well as the foreign minister's meeting with Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel. On his way to the island, the Hungarian foreign minister directly experienced Washington's blockade of Cuba when his flight was delayed for several hours in Ireland, after companies -- fearing reprisals from the U.S. government -- refused to refuel the plane.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/especiales/exclusivas/311075-exclusive-radio-havana-cuba-interview-with-the-honorable-peter-szijjarto-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-hungary>



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