

LAUDATION

on the occasion of bestowing the

JUSTITIA REGNORUM FUNDAMENTUM AWARD

on Zsuzsanna Gerner

Zsuzsanna Gerner was born in Szekszárd, Hungary, in a family of German descent. Her proudly acknowledged ethnic background and the urge to act in the community's interests have been the leitmotif of her life ever since her childhood.

She started her primary studies in Bátaszék, then she attended a primary school in Pécs. She also completed her secondary education in Pécs, graduating from the German Language Section of Leówey Klára Secondary School. She graduated from Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany, in 1987, majoring in German studies.

She joined the staff of the Department of German Studies of Janus Pannonius Teachers' College as a teaching assistant in the same year. She has been working there ever since; however, in the meantime, the Department has become an Institute and the College has grown into a University. Between 1998 and 2005, she was lecturer at the German Language Department of the University of Pécs; in 2005 she was promoted to associate professor. Nowadays she plays a decisive role both in her field of expertise and in the life of the University. In 2006 she was appointed Deputy Director of the Institute for German Studies, since 2009 she has been performing the duties of Deputy Dean (education and general affairs) of the Faculty of Humanities, as well. She has been the Director of the IGS since 2015. As a recognition of her expertise, she is regularly invited to deliver lectures to various universities abroad and at home. She spent some time as guest lecturer in Halden, Norway, and Potsdam, Germany, as well.

In her teaching activities, she continuously strives to integrate the latest results of linguistic research and, as a result, to improve the quality of education. She has a special course acquainting students with the language and identity of Germans in Hungary. In addition to full-time and correspondent courses at both under-graduate and graduate levels, she is also in charge of organizing and conducting training courses at the Department. Her duties include the training of ethnic German language teachers, organizing specialized trainings and coordinating the preparation of teachers for their certification exams.

Her teaching activities are based on her extremely rich research experience. In the field of language history, she specializes in the analysis of documents from the Early New High German period; her sociolinguistic research focuses on the linguistic repertoire, language use and the evolution of the identity of the German minority in Hungary. In an earlier interview, she explained: "As a linguist coming from the German minority in Hungary, I deem it important to learn about the linguistic heritage of the Germans in Hungary and the current state of language contacts, and to acquaint therewith both the majority nationality and the mother country."

The major mileposts of her research activities reflect the changes in her professional interest. Between 1987 and 1993, as a Corresponding Candidate of the Hungarian Academy

of Sciences, she studied the sociolinguistic and geographical linguistic aspects of the East Franconian dialects of German. From 1988, she spent two years in Heidelberg with the scholarship of the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. She started her PhD studies at the Institute for German Studies of Eötvös Loránd University in 1993, where she studied the statics and dynamics of German–Hungarian language contacts. She was awarded her PhD degree in 1999, upon completing her outstanding and innovative thesis in the field of linguistics. She had her habilitation in 2012, she held her habilitation presentation entitled „The statics of language contacts through the example of Germans in Hungary” in Eötvös Loránd University.

Zsuzsanna Gerner is currently member of several high-level professional organizations, including Internationale Gesellschaft der Dialektologie des Deutschen, Historische Soziolinguistik des Deutschen, Historische Frauensprachenforschung, the Hungarian Association of Germanists, the German Studies Working Party of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences’ Regional Committee in Pécs and the Minority Research Working Party of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences’ Regional Committee in Pécs.

Zsuzsanna Gerner has close links to German culture and the German Community not only through her work and scientific activities. Both as a public figure and a private citizen, she is an advocate for the preservation and development of German ethnic identity, maintaining active contacts with local and national organizations protecting the interests of the German minority and promoting their cultural autonomy. In January 2014, as an appreciation of her work, German President Joachim Gauck appointed her as Honorary Consul of the Federal Republic of Germany.

On March 15, 2015, she was awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary, Civil Division, for her prominent work in the fields of teaching, research and for helping the German community in Hungary.

In an interview, she summarized her professional creed as follows: “My goal is to serve as a link between Germany and Hungary. With my work, I would also like to contribute to the strengthening of the German language and culture in Hungary, to facilitate their growth in popularity.”

The Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum Award is hereby bestowed upon Zsuzsanna Gerner for her decades-long efforts in the interests of the German Community in Hungary and for her prominent professional activities in the field of protecting German minority language rights.