

Interview with Ing. Bc. Anna Hubáčková, Minister of the Environment

Minister, I have a question for you to start with. What was Anna Hubáčková like as a little girl? Good grades, a diligent student, or bruised knees and occasional disobedience?

What a question! So – good grades, a diligent student, and occasional naughtiness and a bruised knee.

After secondary school, you joined the Faculty of Civil Engineering of the Brno University of Technology, where you chose the field of water management. Why civil engineering and water?

That was a big coincidence. I originally applied to the Czech Technical University in Prague – construction economics (I don't remember the name exactly). Although I was accepted, at the same time I was offered a transfer to another subject so that a more influential student could be accepted on that course. I was told when I was already on the so-called student summer activity. There I met a great group of students – all from the field of hydraulic engineering. Well, it was decided. If I were to choose another field, then water and Brno University of Technology.

Your first job, if I'm not mistaken, was a position at Vodovody a kanalizace Hodonín, where you were in charge of water source protection. Do you remember your first project from that time?

My first project was also my diploma thesis. It was supply of drinking water to the south-eastern area of Hodonín district. Ing. Stanislav Košacký, the then Deputy of Vodovody a kanalizace, was my consultant. After I joined VaK Hodonín, it was a wonderful discovery for me that my project was not put on a shelf, but it was used: the entire water supply system was built according to it and still works.

My first project as a water manager of VaK Hodonín was the design of water source protection zones. At this point, I don't remember exactly which one it was, but I gradually did them all and I really enjoyed it.

After that, you started to pursue your career as an official. First in the position of head of the environmental office at the District Office in Hodonín and then for a long time as head of the environmental department of the Regional Office of the South Moravian Region. What led you to leave the "technology" and move to the "office" career?

The protection of water sources was the biggest motive. I had ready proposals for buffer zones, and the announcement seemed like an unnecessarily long process. I kept urging the then head of the department until he offered me a job. So, I started to announce them myself! And it was another beautiful job with people, and also the first great experience with persuading people about the necessity to treat water better, protect its quality, etc.

Then you transferred to the Regional Office of the South Moravian Region, where you spent many years. From my personal experience, no one called you other than "our Anička". I took it as eloquent proof of your popularity, which is unprecedented for an official. However, you left office unexpectedly quickly. Is there anything that can be said about this now?

I liked working with my colleagues in the South Moravian Region. We managed a lot, except for the final months, which I chose to forget. Some other

regional politicians came up with different ideas about environmental protection, in which my style of communication and work did not fit. I left straight-away, but whenever I return to the South Moravian Region, even after many years, I am welcome. Unlike them.

The positive perception of your personality by the public was also reflected in your clear victory in the Senate elections in 2016. What were your feelings then?

These were unimaginably strong positive emotions, great joy, and perhaps a little sense of satisfaction.

But then also great responsibility.



During your professional career, you have dealt with many interesting and unusual cases. Which one do you remember the most – for better or worse?

In the field of the environment, you will experience many unique cases and events. It is not the beautiful and successful ones, but mostly the crisis ones that will be etched in your memory the most. Floods, accidents, drought effects, bark beetle outbreaks, mosquito outbreaks, cyanobacteria outbreaks, and others. But even in disasters, you will experience beautiful moments. We went to Podhradí, where people experienced two floods in one year, to explain why it happened. It was, of course, very sensitive, because people were flooded twice in quick succession. Most of the citizens naturally spoke to us very sharply, but there was also a couple whose marriage and family was actually saved by the flood and the trauma they experienced.

You are now the Minister of the Environment. If someone had told you fifteen years ago that one day you would run an entire environmental department, what would you say?

I would have laughed a lot. I would never have admitted that I could become a mayor or a senator, let alone a minister. These are big coincidences, opportunities, and challenges and I just take them.

As Minister of the Environment for the Czech Republic, you are negotiating with the Polish side over a long-running dispute between the Czech Republic and Poland over the effects of mining at Turów lignite mine. This is a difficult task at the outset in the position of Minister. Can this case be compared to something you have experienced and dealt with in the past?

This is a case with an international impact, which I have not experienced often. The South Moravian Region is bordered by two states, Slovakia and Austria, so in joint negotiations about some issues, most often on operations on the Morava and Dyje rivers during floods, I was present, of course; it was this experience that helped me during negotiations in Poland about the activities at Turów mine. It is always about balancing our legitimate interests, our law and, at the same time, respecting international law and the law of another country. It's not easy even when you do nice projects together, for example to protect the landscape, let alone when damage or harm is being addressed.

The topic of sustainable development has been present in our country for thirty years, since the time of the Federal Minister of the Environment Josef Vavroušek. However, many ordinary citizens may feel that not enough has been done in this field.

There are a lot of people around us like Josef Vavroušek, and I feel that there are more and more. I really appreciate all of them, especially the young ones. Yes, we still have many challenges ahead of us, but climate change is also helping to change our thinking, and I firmly believe that change in our landscape and our environment will be faster.

Some time ago, in our magazine, we interviewed Mr. Pavel Fošumpauer (Deputy Head of the Department of Hydraulic Engineering, Faculty of Civil Engineering, CTU – Editor's note), on the topic of "development of education in the field of water management". I'll ask you the same – how do you see the current state of education and would you, as Minister of the Environment, like to ensure that practical ecology becomes part of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools?

Definitely. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, I will try to get ecology into the framework school programmes of primary schools. As we say

in Czech, what you learn in your youth, you will find useful in old age – it will always be true. We will pay more attention to ecological awareness raising and education at our Ministry.

One of your announced priorities is the protection of drinking water. What exactly does that mean for you? What would you adjust/change in the position of Minister of the Environment in this regard?

For me as a Minister, this means presenting legislation that will protect water more – I am already working on presenting a draft amendment to the Constitution. And then also the preparation of subsidy titles which will strengthen returning water to the landscape, protecting its quality, retaining water in the landscape, supporting the construction of new water sources, wastewater treatment, etc. Naturally, I need to do a lot of awareness raising myself, together with the whole Ministry.

In conclusion, I would like to ask a "light-hearted" question. You have a beautiful Czech first name Anna, associated with many Czech sayings and weather lore. Do you believe – as a graduate of two universities – in these traditions and wisdom of our ancestors?

Our ancestors treated nature much better than we did, they knew it better and I trust and honour their heritage in the form of weather lore and traditions.

Vršovická Street, where the Ministry of the Environment is located, is lined with Japanese cherry trees, which bloom beautifully in spring. I hope that you enjoy the view of that street in bloom as often as possible. Thank you for the interview.

Ing. Josef Nistler

Ing. Bc. Anna Hubáčková

Minister of the Environment



Ing. Bc. Anna Hubáčková was born in Hodonín. She is a graduate of water management at the Brno University of Technology and Public Administration at the Faculty of Law of Masaryk University. She worked at the company Vodovody a kanalizace Hodonín, where she was in charge of water resource protection; later she worked as the head of the environmental office at the District Office in Hodonín and the head of the environmental department of the Regional Office of the South Moravian Region. In 2005, she received the Minister of the Environment Award for her work and cooperation with non-governmental organizations. In her position, she was also a member of the crisis staff involved in resolving crisis situations, as well as the chairwoman of the flood commissions. In 2014–2018, she held the position of mayor of Ratíškovice and since 2016 she has been a senator for the Hodonín Region. In 2020, she was elected a representative of the South Moravian Region and served as chairwoman of the Commission for the Environment and Agriculture. She is married and has two adult sons and three grandchildren.