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American Hungarian Federation Helps Plan and Participates in Successful CEEC Congressional Policy Discussion on Central and Eastern Europe

Washington, DC --- On Thursday, June 19, 2008, the Central and Eastern European Coalition (CEEC) sponsored a foreign policy roundtable discussion and reception on Capitol Hill. The purpose of the discussion was to analyze issues of interest to the members of the CEEC, including U.S. relations with Russia, enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and energy policies impacting the region.

The CEEC consists of 18 national ethnic organizations representing 22 million Americans of Central and Eastern European heritage. The American Hungarian Federation (Federation), an active member of the CEEC, helped plan and organize the Congressional roundtable discussion and reception. The Federation's CEEC representative is its Co-President and Chairman of its International Relations Committee, Frank Koszorus, Jr.

The event in the Rayburn House Office Building featured remarks by Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ), Congressman Dan Lipinski (D-IL), and a roundtable discussion with Ambassador-Elect to NATO Kurt Volker and former Ambassador to Kazakhstan and Georgia Bill Courtney.

The roundtable discussion centered on U.S. relations with Russia, leadership changes there, Moscow's attempts to expand its influence in Europe through its energy policies, destabilizing actions on its periphery, and continued opposition to NATO's enlargement. Key points made by the speakers were that the U.S. should continue to assist Ukraine and Georgia achieve Membership Action Plan (MAP) status -- the next step toward NATO membership -- and that Europe and Russia should look toward a strategic partnership in energy decisions.

Rep. Smith, who along with Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) received recognition from the CEEC for their lifetime support for Central and Eastern Europe, condemned Russian pressure against former Soviet bloc countries and declared that the United States must continue to fight for human rights and democracy in the region. Rep. Smith has also been a leader in his support of democracy building in Belarus, as evidenced by his sponsorship of the Belarus Democracy Reauthorization Act and he made special recognition of Belarusian-American activists at the event. Rep. Schwartz expressed her support for democracy movements in Georgia and the country's MAP accession. Rep. Lipinski, Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Central and Eastern Europe (along with Republican Co-Chair Thaddeus McCotter (R-MI)), served as the Congressional host of the reception and greeted participants.

Also present at the event were representatives from the Estonian, Georgian, Polish and Romanian embassies, staff from a dozen congressional offices and Zoltan Bagdy, Co-President of the Federation.

"As we have experienced reading the Wall Street Journal earlier this month, it is critically important to keep focused on key issues affecting Central and Eastern Europe and United States policy toward the region, especially in this election year," noted Mr. Koszorus. "Events such as our congressional roundtable and reception serve that purpose," he added.
