



The American Hungarian Federation

Serving the Community since 1906 - Fidelissimus ad Mortem

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

February 2, 2010

Dear Madam Secretary,

The American Hungarian Federation (the "Federation"), founded in 1906, represents a cross section of Americans who trace their heritage to Central Europe. It supports democracy, minority rights in Central and Eastern Europe and a strong NATO. Our goals are the very same ones you articulated on January 29 in Paris when you stated that human rights "must always be a cornerstone of our security efforts" and underscored the importance of protecting minority rights.

With these goals in mind, we are writing to urge you to publicly and unambiguously express your concern relative to the language law that took effect on September 1, 2009 in Slovakia. By curtailing or eliminating the use of minority languages from the public sphere, that discriminatory law threatens the Hungarian minority's culture and infringes on fundamental freedoms. The significant fines of up to \$7,000.00 exacerbate the anxiety of the members of that minority.

The language law is the latest manifestation of the Slovak government's intolerance toward its Hungarian minority. Not surprisingly, the Slovak National Party ("SNS") is a member of the ruling coalition. Its chairman Jan Slota is known for his xenophobia: "Hungarians are the cancer of the Slovak nation, without delay we need to remove them from the body of the nation." The Stephen Roth Institute has called the SNS "an extremist nationalist party" that seeks to "rehabilitate Jozef Tiso, head of the wartime fascist regime, which was responsible for the deportation of the country's Jews to the death camps."

Such extremism has led to the language law, even though Slovakia promised to respect the rights of its minorities before being accepted into NATO and the EU. Not only has the law caused considerable internal unease in Slovakia, it threatens much needed unity within NATO by increasing tensions between Slovakia and Hungary – both NATO allies.

Considering the far-reaching implications and negative effects of the language law, the response from the United States to date has been tepid, especially compared with the outspokenness about equally disturbing minority issues, such as the Roma. While Senator Cardin, Congressman Kucinich* and former Governor Pataki have laudably spoken out against this ill-conceived law, these have been isolated expressions of concern. We, therefore, respectfully suggest that the appropriate response would be for you to raise the unacceptability of the language law with Slovakia – a law which is inconsistent with Slovakia's freely assumed obligations, Western values, democratic principles and international norms.

Sincerely,

Frank Koszorus, Jr.
Co-president and Chairman, International Relations Committee

*In an October 29, 2009 letter to you, Congressman Kucinich asked you to "encourage the government of the Slovak Republic to repeal . . . the language law," and in a January 28, 2010 letter, he asked Slovak President Fico to "rethink it."

cc: Philip H. Gordon; Nancy McEldowney; Pamela Quanrud; and Jamie T. Moore