



National Press Building #809
Washington D.C. 20045
(202) 737-0127

www.americanhungarianfederation.org / www.hungary1956.com

Open Letter

June 16, 2006

His Excellency Ferenc Gyurcsány
Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary
Budapest

The American Hungarian Federation is a one-hundred-year-old umbrella organization that represents a cross-section of the Hungarian American community. It has for decades monitored the situation of the Hungarians, including the historic Hungarian communities living as minorities in states neighboring Hungary. This letter is written on the occasion of Hungary's 5th democratic election since the demise of communism and the restoration of Hungary's sovereignty.

As you and your government turn from the campaign to the task of governing, the Federation, as an observer, believes that the following urgent and pending matters will have to be addressed with wisdom, leadership and a sense of patriotism for the benefit of the Hungarian nation.

- (1) Your government immediately has to implement the economic reforms, e.g., reduce the budget deficit, that will enable Hungary to realize its potential that appeared achievable a few years ago considering the country's head start relative to its neighbors. Sound fiscal and monetary policies will enable Hungary to become the financial and commercial hub of the region. However, absent reforms, Hungary will lag behind and possibly even face an economic crisis that will be even more painful to remedy than the implementation of the needed reforms today.
- (2) Your government has to adopt policies that support families, without undermining the economic reforms noted above, and blunt if not reverse the decline and aging of the population, which if not halted, will have a negative impact on the economic welfare of the country in the foreseeable future.
- (3) Your government will have to launch a creative and persistent diplomatic initiative to protect the historic Hungarian communities living as national, linguistic and religious minorities in countries neighboring Hungary. As much as some would prefer, Hungary's governing political elite can neither escape the nation's history nor the consequences of that history. Clearly, the minorities require both negative rights, i.e., protection from discrimination and intolerance, as well as positive rights, i.e., cultural, territorial and/or personal autonomy.

Defusing tensions by promoting enlightened policies relating to minorities advances genuine democracy and regional stability, and these all serve the interests of Hungary, the region, the EU, the US and NATO, not to mention the interests of the affected minorities. Hungary can and should play a pivotal role in advancing these interests. Indeed, Hungary should without hesitation openly and effectively support the legitimate aspirations of the Hungarian minorities for autonomy – a precondition for their survival – in multilateral fora as well as in its bi-lateral relations with its neighboring countries.

- (4) Finally, your government should advance democracy by permitting Hungarian citizens outside of Hungary to exercise their right to vote. Facilitating the right to vote should involve the ability of citizens to vote not only in Consulates General, but elsewhere. Furthermore, consistent with the practices of other democracies, other forms, such as absentee ballots *via* the mails or electronically, ought to be available to Hungarian citizens. Today, Hungarians staying in the United States are permitted only to vote in Washington, New York City and Los Angeles. This restrictive practice prevents many eligible voters from voting.

We believe that in order for Hungary to make headway regarding these complex and difficult but urgent and heretofore unresolved issues, your government will have to disregard ideology, reach across party lines and in cooperation with a broad cross-section of Hungarian society, including the Parliamentary parties, intellectuals, religious institutions, academe, opinion makers, and community leaders, help build the consensus necessary for success.

We trust that the political will exists to accomplish this important goal and help Hungary free itself from the lingering debilitations rooted in the 20th century, including those caused by the imposition by force of a foreign totalitarian ideology and an unworkable economic system on the country, foreign occupations, the devastation of two wars, the brutal suppression of the 1956 Revolution and the dismemberment of the 1,100 year old state.

Respectfully:

Frank Koszorús, Jr.
Co-President

István Fedor
President

Bryan Dawson-Szilágyi
Chairman, Executive Committee