



Frank Koszorus, Jr., President
The American Hungarian Federation
Serving the Community since 1906 – *Fidelissimus ad Mortem*

November 25, 2013

Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
Chairman, U.S. Helsinki Commission
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Christopher H. Smith
Co-Chairman, U.S. Helsinki Commission
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Co-Chairman:

The American Hungarian Federation (Federation), founded in 1906 as an umbrella organization, is an independent, non-partisan entity representing a broad cross-section of the Hungarian American community. From its founding, the Federation has supported liberal democracy, human and minority rights, including the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania,* and the rule of law in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Federation respectfully and strongly urges you to publicly on behalf of the Helsinki Commission raise Romania's most recent human rights violation and anti-Hungarian phenomenon – the revocation of the Medal Star of Romania previously awarded to Bishop Laszlo Tokes for his extraordinarily courageous role in toppling the Ceausescu dictatorship during the 1989 revolution. And what was Bishop Tokes' transgression resulting in the revocation – exercising his constitutional rights by standing up for the rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania. The revocation should be reversed.

International condemnation of the revocation quickly followed. For instance, in an open letter (November 22) Dr. Lee Edwards, chairman of The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, noted, that the “charges [against Bishop Tokes] are clearly unfair and unwarranted. Essential European ‘values’ and the Romanian Constitution include the freedom of speech and the right to speak out about controversial issues. Allowing open discussion and public debate is the sign of a vibrant democracy and constitution and should not be tampered with.”

Goren Linblad, President of The Platform of European Memory and Conscience, wrote to Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta on November 20 pointing out that the “persecution, legal or other, of a citizen, any citizen, even a Member of the European Parliament, for exercising his/her freedom of expression and opinion is never acceptable.”

*The Federation has turned to the Helsinki Commission on several occasions to express its deep concern over a raft of human rights violations and anti-minority practices and policies, including but not limited to Romania unjustifiably prosecuting former state secretary Attila Marko, Silviu Vlim and Tamas Marosan in connection with the restitution to the Reformed Diocese of Transylvania of the Szekely Miko Evangelical Reformed College in Sfantu-Gheorghe; failing to reconstitute church, religious and communal properties confiscated by the previous Communist regime; rather than grant its Hungarian minority limited autonomy rights, proposing instead to redistrict administrative units that would further reduce the ability of Hungarians to effectively participate in public affairs, especially in matters affecting them and to enjoy their culture; and refusing to restore the independent Hungarian university in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár.

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Mr. Chairman, although in the context of the Helsinki Commission's hearing on Hungary on March 19, you articulated an important principle, referring to the late Ambassador Max Kampelman who "once observed, minorities are like the canary in the coal mine. In the end, democracy and minority rights stand or fall together. If respect for minorities falls, democracy can't be far behind."

The canary is suffocating in Romania. We, therefore, urge you to also publicly call on Romania to respect and live up to fundamental human rights, including the freedom of expression. The Helsinki Commission needs to be heard; violations of fundamental human rights, anti-minority policies and practices, intolerance and undemocratic measures cannot be tolerated. Silence, we fear, would be misinterpreted by some, as unjustified as that would be, as acquiescence and result in further violations of the very principles the Helsinki Commission is charged to advance.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Frank Koszorus, Jr.
National President
Public Member of the U.S. Delegation of the 1989 Conference
on Security and Cooperation in Europe on the Human Dimension