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AMERICAN HUNGARIAN FEDERATION CONCERNED WITH NEW POLICY TOWARD HUNGARIAN MINORITIES

The American Hungarian Federation (the “Federation”) is the largest Hungarian-American umbrella organization in the United States. Founded in 1906, it is also one of the oldest ethnic organizations in America. Over the years, the Federation has supported democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Central and Eastern Europe. AHF has a long and proud tradition of monitoring and speaking up about the situation of the Hungarian historical communities living as minorities in states neighboring Hungary.

It is the Federation’s conviction that, as Prime Minister Antall stated, Hungary has a special responsibility toward the Hungarian minorities, a responsibility that includes supporting their legitimate aspirations. This essential support must be based on close consultation with the leaders of the affected minorities.

The obligation to maintain the cultural and ethnic identity of Hungarians became one of three pillars of Hungarian foreign policy following the neglect in this area by the Kadar regime. The Antall government’s welcome reversal of this inexcusable neglect was fully consistent with the principles of democracy and should be continued as the situation of the minorities is not resolved.

The Federation’s views on this subject were set forth in its June 16, 2006 open letter to Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany (http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/docs/AHF_Letter_to_PMGyurcsany_2006_06_16_English.pdf). Point three of that letter states:

“(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.”

The Federation is dismayed and concerned that these important principles are being abandoned. For example, the new concept relating to the government’s policy toward minorities appears to emphasize economic growth while ignoring the minorities’ aspirations for autonomy and internationally recognized practices relating to minority rights. Undoubtedly economic welfare is a desirable goal, but it is not a substitute for policies and practices that permit minorities to preserve their unique characteristics and enjoy the benefits of rights that minorities in Western Europe enjoy.

Equally disturbing is the government's forsaking the Hungarian Standing Committee (MAERT) and its elimination of the independent administrative body – the Office for Hungarians Beyond the Borders – which addressed wide-ranging issues relating to Hungarian minorities. There are also reports that the government plans to eliminate or curtail the Laszlo Teleki Institute and place its heretofore independent Foreign Affairs Institute directly under government control.

These and similar steps raise serious questions as to the government's commitment to support a significant and integral part of the Hungarian nation. As a country occupied by the Soviet Union, Hungary was prohibited from addressing the problems of the minorities. Now that Hungary has regained its sovereignty and is integrated into Western institutions, there is no justification for it to neglect the challenges confronting the minorities.

Therefore, any decision, concept or policy that diminishes Hungary's special obligation toward the Hungarian minorities and their democratically expressed aspirations should be reversed. If not, genuine democracy will be the victim as will the minorities themselves. Clearly, this is not the legacy the government wishes to leave.

About AHF: The American Hungarian Federation (AHF), is the largest Hungarian-American umbrella organization in the United States. A non-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1906 in Cleveland, Ohio, AHF is also one of the oldest ethnic organizations in the country. AHF's Motto, "Faithful Unto Death," was taken from a letter written by former Hussar Officer Mihaly Kovats to Benjamin Franklin. Kovats, known as Father of the US Cavalry, offered his sword in service to the United States and died in battle against the British in Charleston, S.C. in 1779. Just as Kovats' life and service is celebrated annually by US Military Cadets at the Citadel, the motto reflects AHF virtues, and historically and inextricably ties Hungarians and Americans together while symbolizing Hungarians' contributions and sacrifices to America's beginning. Among the oldest ethnic organizations in the US, AHF was established as an association of Hungarian societies, institutions and churches to "defend the interest of Americans of Hungarian origin in the United States."

Fidelissimus ad Mortem!

"Hiven Mindhalálíg!" - "Faithful Unto Death!"
- Colonel Michael Kovats de Fabriczy,
in his letter to Benjamin Franklin,
Commandant of the Pulaski Legion,
Father of the US Cavalry and fallen
hero in the American Revolution,
died in battle, Charleston, SC, 1779

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