

The 9th Annual Hungarian Charity Ball
May 9, 2014, Washington, D.C.

On behalf of *Ambassador Szapáry* and the Embassy in Washington, it is a pleasure to greet you all at the 9th Annual Hungarian Charity Ball and I applaud the leadership of the Hungarian Scouts of Washington and the American Hungarian Federation to raise funds for worthy causes, and to support educational and charitable programs.

I would also like to thank the organizers for all their hard work and sleepless nights they have put into – a hopefully very enjoyable sleepless night tonight for everyone.

I love speech writing and I rarely get to actually say them myself so it is a real treat to be here with you all, but I was emphatically told not to abuse the microphone so I will do my best to be short.

My past three years at the Embassy have taught me a great deal about Hungarian identity, its preservation and what the government can and cannot, should and should not do to help maintain it.

One of the most important lessons I learned is that being Hungarian is not a matter of geography. It is not a matter of being in the same time zone with Budapest. And as beautiful as our language is, it is not even a matter of speaking Hungarian fluently (*I know the scout leaders and Hungarian teachers are disinheriting me now*).

With the words of *Sándor Márai*, one of our most venerated 20th century author, who himself spent much of his life outside of Hungary:

*“To be Hungarian is not a status. To be Hungarian is an attitude.”
„Magyarnak lenni nem állapot. Magyarnak lenni magatartás.”*

It is an attitude that is reflected in taking kids to scout meetings, arranging for Hungarian lessons, making family trips to Budapest, learning about Mohács and the reform era together, volunteering as organizers for Hungarian balls and making daily sacrifices for maintaining a culture that makes not only us but those around us richer and better citizens of both countries.

We have a vast cultural legacy with real national heroes. Imagine what the idea of Hungary would be without Jókai, Arany, Petőfi, Vörösmarty, Széchenyi, Deák, Eötvös, Liszt, Görgey, or Kossuth! We are standing on the shoulders of giants.

And when I say “**we**”, I mean we Hungarians, irrespective of zip code or blood line or language proficiency. Hungarians are one of the most spread out nations in the world. Partly because we have been “long torn by ill fate” – as Kölcsey says – but partly because we are a nation of innovators and entrepreneurs who like to discover new frontiers and new challenges.

Hopefully you have noticed that more than two decades after the system change, Hungary has come to terms with this fact and there has been a **profound paradigm shift** in how policy makers think about Hungarians abroad. We no longer think of you, Hungarians in America as a **“loss” to the motherland**. We rather think of you as a resource, as a bridge, as a value added, as part of a global community that has a land somewhere in the Carpathian basin that will always mean something special and that will always welcome you and your children.

This paradigm shift that the diaspora is an integral part of the Hungarian nation – which is something that was willfully and viciously rejected during the Communist times – is now **enshrined in our constitution** and is at the **core of several new initiatives**.

This paradigm shift behind the notion that **Hungarian citizens**, whether they reside in Hungary or not, should be able to have a say at the **general elections** as well. This year was historic in the sense that the entire Hungarian nation from New Zealand to New Jersey could take part in this democratic process. And more than 150,000 did indeed.

And it is also the underlying notion of the **numerous programs** the government has launched in the past three years:

- the **Kőrösi Csoma Program**, through which young students from Hungary come to the United States to strengthen ties with communities here by acting as a link and helping to organize cultural events,
- the **Julianus and Mikes Kelemen Program**, which aims to register, collect and take care of the vast artifacts and memorabilia that represents Hungarian culture,
- the **ReConnect Hungary Program**, which provides an opportunity for young Americans with Hungarian origins to travel to Hungary and reconnect with their roots and familiarize themselves with contemporary Hungarian culture, society and language.
- the re-launch of the **Diaspora Council** and the **Duna World channels**,
- the establishment of the **Hungary Initiatives Foundation** which was set up by the government with a seed grant of 15 million USD, to strengthen the Hungarian diaspora organizations, widen the scope of exchange programs and create new bridges between Hungary and the United States. As someone has said : a much needed shot in the arm for the community.

We recognize that keeping your identity and culture alive here requires **extra effort**, a lot of sacrifice, and considerable time and energy and we at the **Embassy** are here to help any way we can. We have a bigger consular staff than ever and a young and very enthusiastic diplomatic corps who believe in what they do and share a passionate love of their country.

In the end of the day, the reason why it is all worth the investment, on your part as well as on ours, is that Hungary has too much to offer to the world to be ignored and left untaught. So I will leave you with the words of Illyés Gyula and hope you will enjoy the rest of the evening:

A magyar az, aki bátran szembenéz a nép bajaival: a nemzet fejlődésének akadályával. Aki a szabadságot ma is minden téren meg akarja valósítani. Aki a népnek műveltséget, egészséget, jólétet akar. Aki a földművesnek földet, a munkásnak méltó hasznót, mindenkinek emberi bánásmódot kíván, egyéni érdeke ellenére is. Aki egy nyomorult, éhező vagy jogfosztott láttán saját magát is sértve érzi, emberi, magyari mivoltában. Mit mondjak még? A magyar az, akinek jellemzésére azt mondhatjuk el, amit a tökéletes emberről gondolunk.

*Magyar énelőttem az, aki nem bírja a homályt, sem a börtönben, sem a gondolatban. Magyar az, aki az értelmet szereti, aki szenvedélyét csak akkor engedi szabadon, midőn a szó már nem használ az igazság elfogadtatására. **Minden nép közösség. Jó magyar az, aki emberi, jó tagja a magyar közösségnek.** (Illyés Gyula – Ki a Magyar?)*