



# The American Hungarian Federation

*Serving the Community since 1906 - Fidelissimus ad Mortem*

October 10, 2014

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The American Hungarian Federation, founded as an umbrella organization in 1906, is a strong supporter of good American/Hungarian relations, democracy, human and minority rights and the rule of law. We write in connection with your remarks at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York on September 23, 2014, describing your new initiative promoting civil society and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) around the world.

Considering the Federation's purposes and that many of our members have throughout their adult lives promoted civil society and NGOs (and some who took up arms against totalitarianisms), we applaud you for your principled stand and leadership. Civil society advocates are threatened, imprisoned and killed in many countries in the world. Hungary, we respectfully submit, is not one of them.

Hungary is a member of the EU and NATO and a democratic state where thousands of NGOs operate freely and where dissent is extensive and vigorous. Since the fall of communism, Hungary has had seven internationally recognized free national elections. Demonstrators in Budapest, including opposition political parties, can freely gather, protest and air whatever grievances they may have against government policies and freely voice their assertions of alleged governmental interference with Norwegian-backed and funded NGOs. Fairness dictates that at a minimum, an impartial review of these matters be concluded before there is a rush to judgment, especially one that equates Hungary with proven repressive countries.

Thus, although we believe that vigilance is necessary to preclude backsliding when it comes to democracy, we are justifiably puzzled and deeply concerned that you lumped Hungary in with Egypt and some of the worst dictatorships of the world in assessing the state of civil society freedoms. Indeed, in the latest Freedom House country rating report, Hungary scored 12 out of 12 points for protecting the associational and organizational rights of NGOs, which was better than the United States' score of 11/12. Moreover, Hungary scored a perfect 12/12 for its electoral process, whereas the United States scored 11/12. Hungary scored 15/16 for freedom of expression and belief, the very same score as the United States. By sharp contrast, with respect to NGO freedoms, Egypt scored an abysmal 4/12, while Viet Nam, also mentioned in your address, scored a deplorable 1/12.

We therefore respectfully call upon you to retract that part of your statement that unjustifiably places Hungary in the same category with Egypt and other such repressive countries. Doing so would help alleviate the concern, confusion and disbelief found in our community about the United States views of Hungary, a democratic ally. It would also serve to advance the goals of the United States in the region.

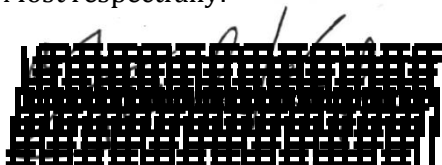
We also respectfully urge you to consider the following two issues in connection with your new policies -- partnering and protecting civil society groups, creating innovative centers, and increasing funding for the Community of Democracies:

(1) When it comes to supporting civil society groups in established and working democracies such as Hungary, transparent and very specific guidelines should be adopted and thorough reviews conducted as to which NGOs are to receive U.S. support, if any. Such guidelines and scrutiny are necessary to guarantee that groups -- conservative or liberal, pro- or anti-government -- that are actually politically partisan entities not receive American support on a disproportionate or discriminatory basis. Even if Hungarian law does not prohibit foreign donations to political campaigns as U.S. laws and regulations do, the absence of such scrutiny and evenhandedness would be less than fortunate. It would alienate democratic Hungarians and give the unavoidable appearance that the U.S. is interfering in the democratic processes of that country and with the democratically expressed wishes of its people when they cast their ballots. In fact, it would appear to some, as erroneous as that perception might be, as if the U.S. is seeking to overturn a democratic result. We fear that this perception would play into the hands of anti-Western radicals by fostering disillusionment in a strong ally and damage U.S. interests by weakening the unity and solidarity that today is so needed to combat terrorists and the growing aggression of Russia; and

(2) Attention should at long last be directed at countries neighboring Hungary which continue to discriminate against their Hungarian minorities. For example, Romania still fails to return communal and religious properties that had been confiscated by the previous communist regime and fails to investigate, prosecute or even condemn vandals who commit hate crimes by defacing Hungarian monuments with anti-Hungarian graffiti. Another example is Slovakia which has adopted discriminatory language and citizenship laws. Failure to address these and other well-documented violations of minority rights, acts of discrimination and instances of intolerance give the appearance of a double standard and would erode the effectiveness of your new policies.

Thank you for considering these important issues which we believe, if appropriately addressed, will substantially contribute to the success of your policies, promote and strengthen civil society, and advance good bi-lateral relations with Hungary -- all interests of the United States. We stand ready to assist you in these endeavors.

Most respectfully:



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



Bryan Dawson  
Co-President  
Chair, Information Committee