



The American Hungarian Federation

Serving the Community since 1906 - Fidelissimus ad Mortem

January 10, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The American Hungarian Federation ("AHF"), founded in 1906 and representing a broad cross-section of the Hungarian American community, supports democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. It also supports the U.S. Helsinki Commission's mission of monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and promoting human rights and democracy. We write in connection with your December 20 statement not because we believe that no steps can be taken to strengthen democracy in Hungary (such as permitting members of parliamentary caucuses to vote their conscience without being fined). Rather we believe that in order to be credible, criticism must be based on the complete record.

As the Helsinki Commission's public utterances carry great moral authority, we are concerned that (1) your assertions concerning Hungary omit relevant facts; and (2) your statement fails to raise the discrimination and intolerant policies toward ethnic Hungarians in some of the countries bordering Hungary. The statement therefore leaves the impression, unintended and unjustified as it may be, of bias, which could result in cynicism toward the Helsinki Commission and its valuable and necessary work.

Concerning Hungary, the only country named in the statement, you conclude that the government's response to certain appalling anti-Semitic phenomena, such as far right politician Marton Gyongyosi urging the government to draw up lists of Jews who pose a "national security risk," is wanting, "to say the least." Do the following facts justify a modified conclusion: the government's immediate condemnation of Gyongyosi's statement; or the demonstration protesting against Gyongyosi at which Fidesz parliamentary group leader Antal Rogan also spoke; or the legislation initiated by Fidesz in response to Gyongyosi's outrageous statement that would allow for the sanctioning of MPs for using incendiary language; or both conservatives and liberals here (including this writer) and in Hungary jointly raising their voice in protest, which sent a loud message that anti-Semitism will not be tolerated; or the government establishing a Hungarian Holocaust Commission; or its raising pensions for the more than 8,000 Holocaust survivors?

And while your statement is silent about discriminatory and anti-Hungarian measures in some of the states neighboring Hungary, it criticizes Budapest for taking legitimate and democratic steps, such as extending citizenship, to protect Hungarian minorities. We urge you to "follow the trends" not only in Hungary, but also in the region and to publicly speak out against anti-Hungarian phenomena, many of which are official acts. Some of the most troubling measures are set forth in our December 1, 2011 and August 20, 2012 letters to you:

http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/docs/Slovakia_Cardin-Smith_2011-12-01.pdf

http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/docs/AHF_Statement_Miko_Helsinki.pdf

These countries should be encouraged to build tolerant societies by respecting the rights of their Hungarian minorities. Ronald S. Lauder, President of the World Jewish Congress, aptly noted, "one of the basic tenets of liberal democracy is that minority rights are protected." And as Congressman Tom Lantos eloquently reminded us, this protection should extend to all religious, national and ethnic groups, including Hungarians.

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