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Remarks of Frank Koszorus, Jr. on the Occasion of the Commemoration of the War of Independence of 1848

“Reflections on Kossuth’s Legacy in America”

Sponsored by the American Hungarian Federation of Metropolitan Washington, D.C.

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We have an English part of the program to reach out to the broader community. As Hungarian Americans we want to share our commemoration with our guests who do not speak Hungarian. It is important to remember that during his trip to the United States, Kossuth eloquently addressed his audiences in impeccable English. He spoke in raptures about Hungarian freedom and independence. As the March 15, 1990 Proceedings relating to the dedication by the United States Congress of a bust of Kossuth states:

“Although Kossuth did not achieve his goal of winning official United States government support and recognition for his struggle for Hungarian independence, his visit did leave a permanent legacy in America. He gave several hundred speeches in all parts of the United States, including separate addresses to both Houses of Congress. During this tour 250 poems, dozens of books, hundreds of pamphlets, and thousands of editorials were written about him and his democratic ideals.”

(Parenthetically I would note that to celebrate and commemorate the friendship and shared values between the people of the United States and those of Hungarian descent and the historic changes taking place in Hungary and the region, the American Hungarian Federation commissioned the bust of Lajos Kossuth and offered it to U.S. Congress twenty years ago).

Let us briefly consider Kossuth’s impact on one such author, Rev. B. F. Tefft who wrote a book, *Hungary and Kossuth or, an American Exposition of the Late Hungarian Revolution*, published in 1852:

“The cause of Hungary being thus lost, for that time at least, my whole interest began to center in that glorious man, who, with a patriotism almost unparalleled, and with efforts nearly superhuman, had given himself up to the work of liberating and restoring his native land.”

And as Ralph Waldo Emerson greeted Kossuth on his arrival at Concord, MA, May 11, 1852:

"[we] have been hungry to see the man whose extraordinary eloquence is seconded by the splendor and the solidity of his actions."

The key phrase is the “solidity of his actions.” Kossuth was a reformer before it was convenient to be one; he was a revolutionary not after the fact but when it was dangerous to be one; and he was an eloquent spokesman for Hungarian liberty when it was not easy to be one – “solidity of actions;” solidity of actions motivated by a “patriotism almost unparalleled” and carried out with nearly “superhuman” efforts.

Isn't this why he is called "Champion of Liberty?"

But let us consider, why do we remember Kossuth?

Do we only remember him because it's customary to do so?

Do we only remember him because we're interested in history?

Do we only remember him because we are fascinated by his mastery of the English language?

I think not.

We not only commemorate, we are inspired by Kossuth and the Hungarian heroes of 1848 – 1849, just as we are inspired by the true heroes of 1956. As the Congress noted, Kossuth's visit left a permanent legacy in America. Well, as Americans we are in a privileged and favorable position to build on that legacy. Indeed, Americans and Hungarians share common values and interests.

Clearly it's in both America's interest and Hungarians' interest that democratic institutions and the rule of law be strengthened in Central and Eastern Europe and that corruption be eliminated.

Clearly it's in both America's interest and Hungarians' interest that Hungary be led by individuals with vision and fortitude, leaders who are capable of shedding the lingering and numbing effects that the totalitarianism of the Cold War period still have on some.

Clearly it's in both America's interest and Hungarians' interest that regional security and stability be enhanced by the ability of Hungarians in the countries surrounding Hungary to fully enjoy the fruits of democracy;

for them to be free from discrimination and intolerance;

to have the Bolyai University restored as a Hungarian institution of higher learning in Kolozsvár;

to be entitled to autonomy, internal self-determination and local self-government;

to be free from a law that criminalizes the use of the Hungarian language, as the anti-democratic and odious Slovak language law does; and I could go on.

But what can we do? Well, for instance, we can reach out to our Congressional representatives and convince them to join the Hungarian Congressional Caucus. That caucus has one active member, Dennis Kucinich, Democrat from Ohio.

Just to compare, the Armenian Congressional Caucus has over two-hundred thirty members. And let's not forget the two communities are almost identical in number – 1.5 million Americans of Armenian and Hungarian descent, respectively. And speaking of numbers, it is essential that we identify ourselves on the 2010 census form. Indeed, an accurate count plays an important role in political, economic, and social decision making. Members of Congress pay attention to individuals who identify themselves as part of a significant group – Hungarian descent; Congressional Members are reminded to keep the group's interests in mind as they address policy matters that affect us or are of special interest to us.

These are just two examples of the steps we can take. Inspired by Kossuth's solidly of actions, let's leave this commemoration with a renewed commitment to support our shared interests and common values and build on Kossuth's permanent legacy.