The American Hungarian Federation
Serving the Community since 1906 - Fidelissimus ad Mortem

December 8, 2014

The Honorable John McCain
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator McCain:

The American Hungarian Federation ("Federation"), founded in 1906, is an independent, non-partisan entity representing a broad cross-section of the Hungarian American community. From its founding, the Federation has supported democracy, human and minority rights, and the rule of law in Central and Eastern Europe as well as good American/Hungarian relations and the strategic interests of the United States in the region. The Federation is also a member of the Central and East European Coalition, which issued a policy paper on September 15, 2014 on democracy and national security issues in the region. The paper is available at:

http://www.ceecoalition.us/2014FallCEECPolicyBriefSept15%20.pdf

We are writing to express our deep concern with the critical statements you made about Hungary during the vote confirming Ambassador Colleen Bell on Tuesday, December 2, 2014, which may unwittingly have an adverse impact on the strategic interests of the United States in Hungary and the region. It has already needlessly undermined good bilateral relations between the United States and Hungary.

Recall your trip to Hungary in January of this year when you astutely identified that interest as follows:

"We also discussed with both the Prime Minister and the opposition our many common foreign policy interests. We share a commitment to consolidating democracy in the Balkans, integrating Ukraine into Europe, fostering a free and peaceful Afghanistan, and deepening security cooperation in NATO, especially on counterterrorism… The United States is grateful for the strong international cooperation that we enjoy with Hungary, and its willingness to play a leadership role on behalf of international peace and security. We believe that the success of our alliance is measured, in large part, by what we do together to support a more democratic, secure, and prosperous future -- not just in Europe but also beyond Europe."

Indeed, Hungary is a committed NATO, a strong U.S. ally and a democracy, albeit an imperfect and evolving one, as even mature democracies evolve, having regained its freedom from Soviet domination a mere twenty-five years ago. Its support for United States foreign policy goals stands in marked contrast to West European ambivalence about U.S. global leadership after the end of the Cold War. Hungarian identification with the U.S. extended beyond elite opinion and was rooted strongly in the popular imagination. This reservoir of popular support was a precious commodity that gave U.S. foreign policy a competitive advantage in the region during the Cold War and the years that have followed. It is a commodity we need to nurture today in order for us to be able to effectively stand up against growing Russian aggression and to combat terrorism.

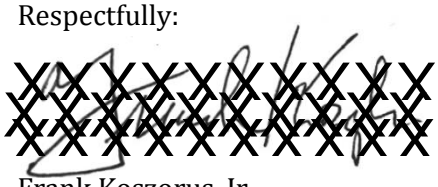
This instinctive popular support, however, has been at risk in Hungary in recent years, mainly due to the perception of a lack of evenhandedness in addressing the political landscape in Hungary. It is also due to a constant public barrage of questionable allegations some of which have been inspired by opposition parties and their allies in the West singling Hungary out for criticism by questioning Hungarians' commitment to democracy and democratic norms. This barrage is often perceived as humiliating and patronizing by the Hungarian people, many of whom support their government, and tends to ignore that the government has won seven internationally recognized free elections. Even the non-partisan Freedom House in their latest country reports gave Hungary the highest score for its electoral process (12 out of 12) and also high scores for such hallmarks of democracy as respecting freedom of expression and media freedoms. Please see our October 10 letter to President Obama and October 22 letter to Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland for greater detail of these issues:

http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/docs/AHF_CEPA_Obama_2014-10-22-signed.pdf

We agree that Hungary is an important country given the recent, alarming and unacceptable developments in Ukraine and otherwise. We fear that your critical characterization of Hungary last week was unjustified and unbalanced and your labeling its prime minister a neo-fascist dictator was just plain wrong. These gratuitous statements further confused, alienated and angered the Hungarian people. Unless appropriately and timely addressed, this, in turn, will undermine support for the security matters noted above to the detriment of American strategic goals.

We, therefore, respectfully urge you to apologize to the Hungarian people for the unwarranted neo-fascist remark and supplement your statement by publicly referencing the value of Hungary's contribution as a loyal ally and friend of the United States as you did earlier this year and the reciprocal friendship from the United States toward Hungary and the Hungarian people. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and believe these steps will go a long way to promote American interests in the region. We are prepared to assist you in this endeavor and suggest that we meet to discuss the same.

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