



The American Hungarian Federation

Celebrating 100 Years of Service - Fidelissimus ad Mortem

Statement before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

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"NATO Enlargement: Promoting Western Values, Strengthening the Alliance"

Since the 1960s the American Hungarian Federation of Metropolitan Washington, D.C. (the "Federation") and its predecessor organization have monitored developments in Central Europe and United States policy toward that region. The Federation supports NATO's enlargement because it believes that (1) an enlarged NATO, consisting of stable and secure countries and as an organization of collective defense, is in the vital interest of the United States; and (2) since an indispensable component of security in Central and Eastern Europe is a commitment to democracy, including the respect for the rule of law and the rights of national and religious minorities, Romania and Slovakia should be encouraged to continue their reforms to promote that vital American interest.

NATO's ENLARGEMENT ADVANCES UNITED STATES' INTERESTS

During the Cold War, NATO successfully kept the peace in Europe by deterring outside aggression. The United States recognized that threats to European security represented threats to American security as well. That common purpose shared by Western democracies was the glue that ensured that NATO would not falter in its mission and prevail over the Warsaw Pact.

At the end of the Cold War and as a result of the strong leadership exercised by the United States, the alliance enlarged to take on Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. That enlargement not only served American moral objectives, it also advanced United States security interests in Europe. A security vacuum was filled as the three new NATO members were reintegrated with the West. They helped stabilize Europe by contributing to NATO's new mission of stopping ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and keeping the peace in the Balkans. All three also served as models for the other countries aspiring to be NATO members.

While NATO invoked Article V in response to September 11 and sent AWACS to patrol American airspace, it must continue to transform and implement the Prague commitments to meet the new threats presented by terrorism. Despite the current rift in the wake of the war against Iraq, the United States must remain engaged in Europe and NATO to carry out the war against international terrorism. As Senator Biden noted on May 1, 2002 before this Committee, "no one should doubt that NATO . . . remains essential to the security of the United States." At the same meeting, Senator Lugar stressed that "the war on terrorism makes it all the more important to accelerate the task of consolidating democracy and security in Central and Eastern Europe."

The current round of enlargement will continue this process and further stabilize Europe from the Baltics to the Balkans and the center of the continent. In sum, a secure Europe and an enlarged NATO with members committed to Western values and prepared to assist in the war against global terrorism will advance American strategic concerns.

THE INVITED COUNTRIES MUST CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT REFORMS, INCLUDING MINORITY RIGHTS, TO ENSURE SECURITY AND STABILITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Minority Rights. Long-term American interests in maintaining a strong and stable alliance capable of joining the war against terrorism, however, will be served only if the invited countries are required to push through much needed political reforms.

In order to promote this fundamental American interest, NATO must ensure that the new members are committed to Western values by deeds, not just by verbal assurances. They must be prepared to contribute to the security of Europe. Security, however, is as much a function of the stability that is associated with democracy and minority rights as it is a function of military reforms and equipment in the context of multi-ethnic Central and Eastern Europe.

This was recognized during the first round of NATO's enlargement. The March 26, 1997 RFEIU report titled, "Europe: U.S. Senator Outlines Criteria for NATO Expansion," reported that Senator Biden "said Senators will determine whether the prospective members maintain democratic institutions, respect civil and minority rights and keep their military forces under civilian control before they vote their consent." (Emphasis added.) In his article, "Slovakia and NATO: The Madrid Summit and After," National Defense University Strategic Forum, April 1997, Jeffrey Simon wrote: "In sum, the major stumbling block to Slovakia's candidacy to NATO arises from questions about the most fundamental criterion -- the shared democratic values of respect for the rule of law and minority rights." (Emphasis added.)

The Membership Action Plan ("MAP"), developed after the first round of enlargement, also embraces minority rights. As Robert A. Bradtke, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs testified before the House International Relations Committee on June 19, 2002, "[t]he success of the MAP is reflected in the real progress that all of the aspirants have made in addressing difficult and sensitive issues. . . . They are all working hard to consolidate democracy and the rule of law, to strengthen judicial systems . . . to improve the treatment of minorities . . ." (Emphasis added.)

The question of minority rights and European stability is not an academic exercise. As the tragic events in the Balkans in the nineties demonstrated, a primary cause of tensions and violence in the region is discrimination against and intolerance toward national, ethnic and religious minorities by the majority. Moreover, a government that fails or refuses to respect minority rights can hardly be deemed genuinely democratic, even if it has come to power through the ballot.

The genesis of today's inter-ethnic challenges in the middle of Europe can be traced back to the beginning of the last century. The Peacemakers following the First World War created a new European order by drastically redrawing the map of the continent, often ignoring the vaunted principle of self-determination in the process. When the dust settled after the peace conference, over 30 million people found themselves living as minorities in the new Europe. This system was perpetuated by Stalin and lasted until the end of the Cold War.

Now with the end of the Cold War, the governments of the region should be held accountable to the international community, especially on questions of human and minority rights. Some minorities are still denied a host of rights and subjected to continuing discrimination, however. A persistent problem in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe is the mistreatment of the Roma and conspicuous anti-Semitism. As noted below, Romania and Slovakia have yet to fully respect the rights of their respective Hungarian minorities. Regardless of its target, discrimination is not only inconsistent with Western values, the rule of law and inter-ethnic harmony, it also undermines regional security.

The prospect of NATO membership has motivated the invitees to address minority rights. Lithuania, a strong and deserving candidate for NATO membership, has gone far in respecting the rights of its Polish and Russian minorities and providing them schooling in their mother tongue. This process needs to continue if NATO is to be strengthened as it enlarges.

Romania is strategically significant and has contributed military forces to NATO and coalition actions. Its democratic reforms, while undeniable, have been overstated. As Adam LeBor in his article, "Alliance bends its rules for strategic Romania," *Times Online* on November 20, 2002, noted, "Romania will be invited to join NATO this week despite its endemic corruption, a systematic lack of government transparency and poor progress towards a Western-style civil society." The 2002 Country Reports on Human Rights released by the Department of State documents many of these problems as well.

Romania must continue its reforms in the area of human rights to approach Western norms. More than a decade after the Revolution, Romania has yet to fulfill its promises to its more than 1.5 million strong ethnic Hungarians. While Bucharest lavishly funds the Orthodox Church engaged in a church building spree, it has returned less than 1% of the more than 2000 religious and communal properties illegally seized during the Communist era to Romania's Hungarian minority.

Romania disregards the constitutional guarantee relating to the right to an education in the mother tongue. Romania has even failed to establish Hungarian language departments at the Babes / Bolyai University, much less restore the independent Hungarian state university in Cluj/Kolozsvár.

Slovakia has progressed since the Meciar government. Nonetheless, the 2002 Country Reports notes that "[e]thnic minorities . . . faced considerable societal discrimination." *Id.* at I. Moreover, "[d]ecentralization to provide more autonomy to regions in education, land ownership, and restitution of confiscated property continued to be an issue for the large Hungarian minority." *Id.* at 12. In addition to the denial of adequate representation as a result of gerrymandered Meciar-era territorial units and curtailed opportunity to use their mother tongue, agricultural and religious communal properties have not been returned to Slovakia's ethnic Hungarians because of the discriminatory effect of the Benes Decrees.

CONCLUSION

NATO must be enlarged to fulfill its mission and serve the security interests of the trans-Atlantic community. At the same time, the United States and the alliance should take steps to promote continued progress by Romania and Slovakia in developing laws and practices toward their minorities that are compatible with Western values and NATO's security goals. The time is now for NATO to seize the moment and help countries with less than adequate records accelerate, consolidate and institutionalize enlightened minorities policies. The carrot of NATO membership has been a strong incentive for every serious invitee to undertake much needed reforms. The review and reform process should not stop with full NATO membership, however. The United States and NATO will have to continue to monitor the pace of progress and reform to ensure that the new members live up to their commitments and promote regional security by respecting the human rights of their national and religious minorities. As part of this process, Romania and Slovakia should be expected to expeditiously resolve the long-pending religious, educational and other Hungarian minority community property restitution matters.