



# The American Hungarian Federation

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## **THE AMERICAN HUNGARIAN FEDERATION CONDEMNS REFUSAL BY UKRAINE TO AMEND ITS ANTI-MINORITY EDUCATION LAW**

The American Hungarian Federation (AHF), founded in 1906, represents a broad cross-section of Americans who trace their heritage to Hungary. Throughout its 110 year old existence, AHF has supported democracy, minority rights in Central and Eastern Europe, a strong NATO and an open door policy toward NATO enlargement to include countries which seek and qualify for membership.

AHF believes a cornerstone of U.S. security interests in a region that has not always been tolerant of its Hungarian (and other) minorities is the protection of minority language rights in accordance with Western standards and bilateral agreements.

AHF strongly supports sanctions against Russia to achieve the cessation of Russian aggression against Ukraine, restoration of Ukraine's border, the establishment of strong democratic values and institutions, and the integration of Ukraine into Western institutions and organizations. More broadly, AHF supports democracy and its indispensable elements: the rule of law, human rights, minority rights, freedom of the press and historical accuracy in the region.

With respect to minority rights in Ukraine, AHF is concerned that Article 7 of the new Ukrainian education law limits the right of sizable minorities living in Ukraine, including Hungarians, Poles and Romanians, to continue to be educated in their mother tongue beyond the fourth grade. The Ukrainian Parliament passed the controversial legislation on September 5, 2017 and the president signed it into law on September 25. The law is expected to affect at least 400,000 children studying in 735 state schools which offer instruction in minority languages. Zakarpattia Oblast, a province of Hungary that was lost to Czechoslovakia by the terms of the Peace Treaty of Trianon after WWI, was eventually annexed by Stalin to Ukraine SSR after WWII, leaving hundreds of thousands of Hungarians across the new border, and, along with them, a centuries-old Hungarian educational system.

On December 8, the Venice Commission, a group of constitutional lawyers who advise the Council of Europe, recommended that Ukraine amend the law, making it "more balanced." The Ukrainian response was swift and uncompromising – Ukraine will not amend the disputed anti-minority law.

Not only does this law adversely affect minorities and conflict with instruments adopted by Ukraine, including the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages under the Council of Europe, it also unnecessarily harms Ukraine's heretofore good relations with Romania, Poland and Hungary, whose leaders have strongly objected to the new law. This development may impede Ukraine's integration with the European Union.

AHF, therefore, urges the United States to call upon Ukraine to reconsider and amend this law and its implementation to ensure that the language rights of national minorities in Ukraine are fully protected, regional tensions dissipated and democracy advanced.