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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 10, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing in advance of your scheduled meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to express concern about Hungary's downward democratic trajectory and the implications for U.S. interests in Central Europe. We urge you to raise these issues in your meeting with the Prime Minister.

In recent years, democracy in Hungary has significantly eroded. As Dalibor Rohac from the American Enterprise Institute recently observed, Hungary has experienced a steady corrosion of freedom, the rule of law and quality of governance according to virtually any indicator, including the assessments of the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute and the World Bank. The Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom places the protection of property rights in Hungary in the mostly unfree territory. Freedom House recently downgraded Hungary to "partly free" status – the first European Union country and the first post-communist country to experience such a decline. Under Orban, the election process has become less competitive and the judiciary is increasingly controlled by the state. Press freedom has declined as advertisers have been strongly discouraged from placing ads in independent outlets and ownership has been consolidated under a foundation that is exempt from antitrust regulation.

While the U.S. has sought to counter Kremlin aggression across Europe, we remain profoundly concerned about the close relationship between this NATO partner and Moscow. Hungary has failed to diversify its energy resources away from Moscow. Hungary has allowed Russia to exploit its "golden visa" system to evade U.S. sanctions. The relocation of the International Investment Bank (IIB, the successor to the Cold War institution known as Comecon) from Moscow to Budapest is an exercise in Russian power projection. Most disturbingly, despite an extradition request from the United States based on an existing and active bilateral treaty, Hungary rejected the request and sent two arms dealers to their freedom in Moscow.

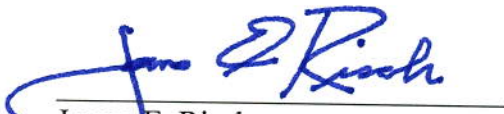
We recognize that Hungary has an important security role in NATO. We welcome the recent signing of the Defense Cooperation Agreement and hope there will not be further delays in its

approval by Hungary's parliament. We urge you, however, to not diminish the importance of democratic values in our bilateral relationship with Budapest.

As Secretary Pompeo said during his recent visit to Central Europe in February: "Every nation that raises its voice for liberty and democracy matters, whether that's a country that's as big as the United States and with as large an economy as we have in America, or a smaller country. They're each valuable. Each time one falls, each time a country – no matter how small – each time it moves away from democracy and moves towards a different system of governance, the capacity for the world to continue to deliver freedom for human beings is diminished." We strongly agree.

Americans proudly supported Hungarian freedom fighters against Soviet invaders in 1956 and the world was inspired 30 years ago this month when Hungarians tore down the fence between their country and Austria, a landmark event in 1989's remarkable democratic transitions across Europe. We hope that Hungary will return to these democratic roots and inspiring history. We stand in solidarity with the Hungarian people and urge you to remain true to these democratic values that have undergirded our relations with Central and Eastern Europe since the end of the Cold War.


Sincerely,




James E. Risch  
Chairman



Robert Menendez  
Ranking Member



Marco Rubio  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator