

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 20, 2018

Ambassador David B. Cornstein  
U.S. Embassy Budapest  
Szabadság tér 12  
H-1054 Budapest, Hungary

Dear Ambassador Cornstein:

We write to express our mounting concern over democratic backsliding in Hungary, including the most recent forced expulsion of the Central European University (CEU). This petty and counterproductive move by the Hungarian government comes on the heels of increased intimidation and shrinking of the country's free press. While we appreciate the challenge of engaging the Viktor Orban regime, such moves by his government are antithetical to key American democratic values and international norms and do not go unnoticed in the United States Congress.

The Central European University enjoys considerable bipartisan support in Congress—and for obvious reasons given its commitment to open society and critical thinking in a former Soviet Bloc nation still consolidating its democratic gains. As such, we were deeply disturbed by reports that you did not wield sufficient U.S. leverage over Hungary to try to achieve a better outcome and instead tried to blame the university for its ouster. Our understanding is that CEU attempted to comply with bullying legislation targeting foreign academic institutions by establishing a program at New York's Bard College, a step Orban's government refuses to acknowledge. In the end, there should have been a way for the United States to find a more suitable solution to such a government vendetta that adheres to American values and serves Hungarian students hoping for a top education.

Similarly, the last few years have seen deeply troublingly and brazen efforts to undermine access to independent media in Hungary. Just recently, more than a dozen owners gave 400 news websites, newspapers, television channels, and radio stations to a front group run by Orban loyalists. Taking from the tired autocrat playbook, Orban is obviously trying to silence those critical of his government or unwilling to serve as regime mouthpieces.

Lastly, we are troubled by Hungary's seeming leanings toward Moscow, including its refusal to extradite to the United States two Russians wanted for selling arms to drug cartels and harboring of pro-Russian, ex-Macedonian prime minister Nikola Gruevski, a fugitive facing prison at home over corruption charges.

We have many shared interests in our important relationship with Hungary. Nevertheless, we expect these shared interests to be pursued with underlying core American democratic values.

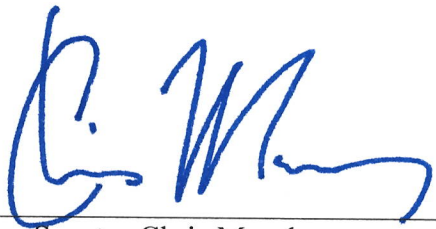
Sincerely,



Senator Richard J. Durbin



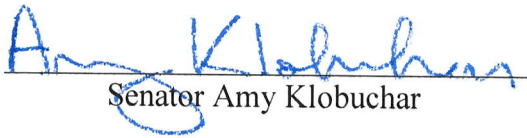
Senator Jeanne Shaheen



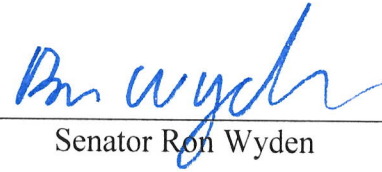
Senator Chris Murphy



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand



Senator Amy Klobuchar



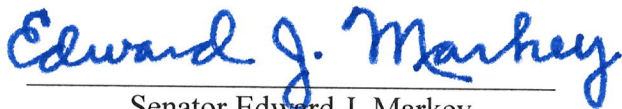
Senator Ron Wyden



Senator Charles E. Schumer



Senator Cory A. Booker



Senator Edward J. Markey



Senator Bernard Sanders