



Two Nations Dishonored

Joint Statement by the American Hungarian Federation and the Polish American Congress
May 18, 2016

As representatives of the Polish and Hungarian-American communities, we are disturbed by the offensive comments made last week by former President Bill Clinton impugning the civic character of the populations of Poland and Hungary. While campaigning in New Jersey, Clinton had stated that Poles and Hungarians were tired of democracy and wanted “authoritarian dictatorship.”

Let us state here unequivocally that nothing could be farther from the truth. The current Polish and Hungarian governments were elected by significant majorities in free and fair elections, recognized as such by the international community, and they enjoy broad public support. That they are politically conservative may not be to Clinton’s or others’ taste, but this in no way diminishes their essentially democratic attributes or their standing in the international community as free and sovereign, just as the popularly elected socialist governments that preceded them.

The freedoms that Poles and Hungarians enjoy today, on open display in their vibrant and diverse media cultures, have been hard earned at great human cost as Clinton must surely know. Theirs was a decades long struggle against Soviet tyranny, a struggle which helped in no small way to create the strategic climate leading to the very dissolution of the Soviet Union. The firmness displayed by the Republican administration of President Ronald Reagan and before that the Democratic administration of President John F. Kennedy was critical to putting a finish to this tyranny. But even more critical, as Clinton fails to acknowledge, was the brave resistance of the Polish and Hungarian people themselves.

It is ironic that on the 60th anniversary of the two pivotal events that sounded the impending death knell of the Soviet Union -- the uprisings in Poznań, Poland and Budapest, Hungary -- a former President of the United States would suggest that the heart’s desire of Poles and Hungarians had turned from freedom to renewed dictatorship.

This is a grave accusation that dishonors the heritage of the nearly twelve million Polish- and Hungarian-Americans living in the United States today. But it dishonors even more those making it, regardless of who they are.

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