



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Recent Constitutional Changes in Hungary

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 19, 2012

Hungary is a great friend and ally of the United States. Its forces operate side-by-side with ours in Afghanistan, it served as our protecting power in Libya, and its representatives have worked with us to advance many important issues around the world – in this forum at the OSCE and in many others. Because we share mutual commitments to the rule of law and fundamental freedoms that fall within the mandate of the OSCE, the United States would like to comment here on changes to the Hungarian Constitution that went into effect on January 1, as well as related legislation passed in 2011. We note that our concerns in this regard are shared by the European Commission, which announced on January 17 that it has found a number of Hungarian laws to be incompatible with EU law.

While we recognize that there are many types of constitutional models, and that Hungarian laws are for Hungarians to decide, recent “cardinal laws” passed by the Hungarian Parliament have effectively eroded the independence of key government institutions as well as important non-governmental elements of society and scaled back the checks and balances that are crucial to a democracy and the protection of civil liberties. We further note that the government of Hungary rushed through much of this critical legislation, and changed rules of procedure to reduce open debate on key legislation that should have been the subject of a dialogue with civil society.

We concur with concerns that the European Commission has raised about recent Hungarian legislation on the judiciary and the Hungarian Central Bank, and support the EC’s request that appropriate changes be made to the laws in question. In addition, the U.S. continues to have concerns regarding Hungary’s media law and religion law.

Therefore, we urge the Government of Hungary to work in a constructive manner to address these concerns as expressed by the U.S., the EC, and others. We also encourage Hungary to invite experts from ODIHR to review the new Basic Law and its related “cardinal laws,” in light of the above-mentioned concerns, to ensure that the independence of key government institutions, the preservation of checks and balances, and the protection of civil liberties are upheld.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.