

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 24, 2019

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

Dear Ambassador Cornstein:

Several of us have written to you before about upholding American democratic values and security interests when dealing with the autocratic host government of Victor Orban, whose embrace of Russia and antidemocratic actions are cause for considerable concern. As such we are deeply troubled that Hungary proposed moving Russia's International Investment Bank (IIB) – widely seen as an arm of Russia's secret services and whose chairman has longstanding ties to Russian intelligence – from Moscow to Budapest. We are also troubled by reports that you may have inappropriately interfered in the legislatively established firewall designed to protect the independence of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's broadcast content as it notably restarts service in Hungary.

Regarding the IIB, you reportedly said you were given guarantees that its personnel would not automatically be granted diplomatic immunity and that they would be thoroughly screened before provided with immunity. And yet, Prime Minister Orban's Chief of Staff Gergely Gulyás reportedly denied that any such assurances were made. Furthermore, this spring Orban's ruling party in parliament passed a law granting exactly such immunity to the IIB's employees. The relocation of the IIB has direct implications for U.S. national and NATO allies.

Prime Minister Orban's assault on the freedom of the press in Hungary is also a serious concern. Consequently, we applaud the U.S. Agency for Global Media's (USAGM) decision to return independent news broadcasts to Hungary via Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). It is for this reason that we are so deeply troubled by media reports that you sought to gain assurances from the agency that it would avoid negative stories or investigative journalism regarding Hungary.

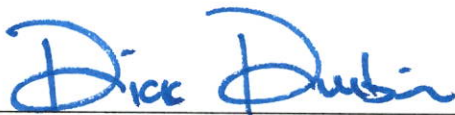
The enabling legislation of USAGM enshrines a critical protection against editorial interference by U.S. government officials in the objective independent reporting of its broadcasting bodies, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. This action comes amid Hungarian media's continued amplification of Russian propaganda and after last year's inexplicable decision to cancel a \$700,000 State Department grant to support objective media reporting in Hungary – a move some of us raised in writing with you at the time. Given the troubling media intimidation and efforts to undermine free speech by the Orban government – autocratic moves counter to basic American freedoms and values – any attempt to now interfere in RFE/RL's content, especially by the U.S. government or government officials, would be deeply concerning.

As we seek to better understand the nature of IIB's disposition in Budapest and U.S. engagement on the issue, as well as any inappropriate interference in USAGM's decision to broadcast in Hungary, we request that you address the following questions:

1. Did the United States communicate to Hungarian authorities its opposition to the relocation of the IIB from Moscow to Budapest, the capital of a NATO ally?
2. Did Prime Minister Viktor Orban assure you that the IIB's employees would not automatically be granted immunity and that all visa applicants would be thoroughly screened by Hungary's intelligence services? If so, when did he make this assurance and were these assurances made by any other Hungarian government official to you or to any other U.S. personnel at our Embassy?
3. Does the U.S. Embassy assess that the Hungarian intelligence services are capable of implementing thorough screening and monitoring of potential Russian intelligence personnel in the country? If so, do they have the will to conduct such screening?
4. Have the Hungarian intelligence services cooperated with U.S. intelligence in monitoring the activities of the IIB and its personnel currently in Hungary?
5. Do you have concerns about intelligence cooperation with the Hungarian government given the Hungarian government's relationship with Moscow?
6. Do you agree with the Hungarian government's assessment that the IIB is not a Russian bank, particularly in light of the institution's decision-making structure?
7. Did you or any of your staff have any meetings with representatives of the USAGM or RFE/RL about plans to return broadcasting to Hungary? If so, did you or any of your staff in any way try to shape or restrict the content of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcasts into Europe?
8. What has the U.S. Embassy under your tenure done to push back against free media intimidation by the Orban government?

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



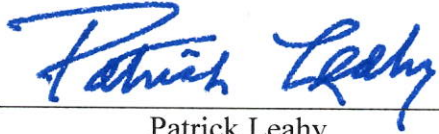
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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

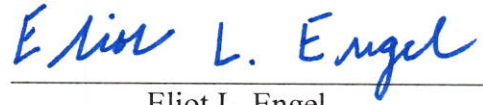


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Tom Malinowski  
Member of Congress



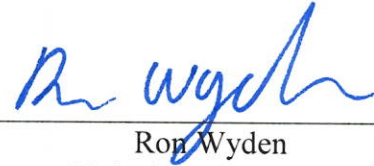
Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



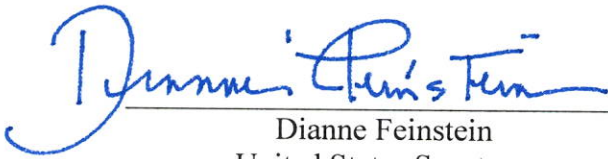
Eliot L. Engel  
Member of Congress



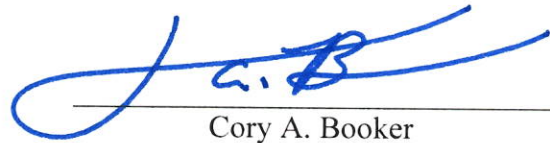
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



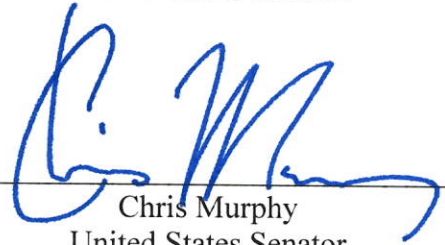
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Chris Murphy  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

CC: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo