

Welcome Address by Ambassador Eleni Tsakopoulos Kounalakis at the 20th Anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian Atlantic Council

October 5, 2012, Stefania Palota, Budapest

- as delivered -

Thank you for the kind introduction and for inviting me here today. Minister Martonyi, Minister Hende, Dr. Vizi, Dr. Lamers, Dr. Gulyas and so many others, it's a great privilege to be here and I am very happy to join you in congratulating the Council on reaching this very important milestone, and applaud its continuing dedication to promoting transatlantic understanding.

The need for this cooperation is greater than ever. Over the past weeks and months, the disturbing incidents in the Middle East and North Africa have made clear not only that democratic transition is difficult and sometime dangerous, but that our partnership with Europe is vital to pursuing a safer world. The tragic loss of our colleagues in Benghazi underscores once again the critical nature of our partnership, and of our Alliance, as we work together to face down threats to peace, stability and security. I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the Government of Hungary, and many individuals here, for their thoughtful words following the loss of Ambassador Chris Stephens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty on September 11. As President Obama said, these public servants "exemplified America's commitment to freedom, justice, and partnership with nations and people around the globe, and stand in stark contrast to those who callously took their lives."

As I've said many times, our relationship with Hungary and Central Europe is based on shared values and interests, and on the shared responsibilities that we now face together as allies. Twenty years since the region's successful transition to democracy and integration into NATO, the question the United States is asking is no longer "what can we do for the nations of Central Europe?" It is now "what can we, together with the European Union and the nations of Central Europe, do together for the rest of the world?"

That's why one of the most important and successful areas of cooperation between Hungary and the United States remains international security. Although our security relationship goes back only twenty years, it has brought substantial benefits to both of our countries, to Central Europe and indeed to the world. I have had the privilege to observe, together with Minister of Defense Csaba Hende, Hungarian troops in action in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Bosnia. I have met many of the fine Hungarian men and women who serve in Afghanistan along their American brothers- and sisters-in-arms. Hungary is providing invaluable assistance out of a shared sense of duty, shared values and a common assessment of the threats we face. During these past 20 years, the United States has invested over 50 million dollars in education, training and equipment for the Hungarian Defense Forces here on the ground. We have sent hundreds of officers and NCOs to training in the United States and U.S. facilities in Europe. And HDF and American forces have participated together in countless exercises and operational deployments together.

In September, Secretary Panetta welcomed Minister Hende to Washington and expressed our government's deep appreciation for Hungary's participation in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. This included thanking Hungary for the work it is currently carrying out at Regional Command North and for Hungary's plan to lead the force protection mission at Kabul International Airport this fall.

We appreciate Hungary's engagement in the Balkans and its advocacy for NATO's open door policy as well. Hungary has also worked closely with the United States and other partners as we and our allies have sought to respond to the political changes in North Africa and the Middle East, and particularly in

Libya and Syria. As I have said before, the United States was truly grateful for Hungary's assistance as our Protective Power in Libya, and we are fortunate to have Hungary's continuing diplomatic presence and expertise in Syria and in Libya.

Ladies and gentleman, it is truly a pleasure to be here with you today to celebrate the Hungarian Atlantic Council and the transatlantic relationship. Let us continue to work together, through organizations such as yours, to strengthen that relationship. Let me finish by saying that the past two and a half years in Hungary have expanded and enriched my knowledge and appreciation for all things Hungarian. This has deepened my conviction that Hungary is a multi-faceted and complex nation, full of potential and talent – and a true friend to the United States. Thank you.

http://hungary.usembassy.gov/kounalakis_10052012.html