



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

October 1, 2019

The Honorable
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Shaheen:

Thank you for your September 24 letter expressing concerns about certain developments in Hungary. The Department of State looks forward to continuing the dialogue with you and other members of Congress on these issues.

The Department seeks to advance American interests in Central Europe through strong engagement with our NATO Allies and shares your concerns about Russian covert, coercive, and corrupt malign influence efforts in the region. At the same time, the Department also holds Allies accountable for living up to their Washington Treaty commitments, including Article 2's commitment to uphold free institutions, as well as their OSCE commitments.

Ambassador Cornstein and other U.S. officials urged Hungary against the relocation of the International Investment Bank (IIB) offices to Budapest. They warned it could be an instrument for Russian malign influence in the region. As the relocation moved forward, Ambassador Cornstein worked to secure assurances from the Hungarian government to mitigate such concerns. Further details about those assurances would need to be conveyed in a closed briefing, as would any discussion of possible intelligence assessments, activities, or cooperation.

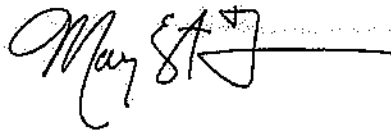
The Department also shares your view on the importance of freedom of the press, and Ambassador Cornstein and others from the Embassy have stated this view clearly as well. An informed and engaged citizenry is a fundamental requirement for a free and resilient nation. As part of its standard process when considering the launch of coverage in a given country, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) consults with the Department of State, including most recently with Ambassador Cornstein in Budapest on September 26. The Department supports the U.S. Agency for Global Media's expansion to Hungarian service to further diversify Hungary's information environment.

Regarding the notice of funding opportunity for independent media, the Department chose to take a regional approach to address broader challenges facing Central European media and looks to strengthen support for investigative journalism networks throughout the region. The Department is working to strengthen U.S. influence and prevent strategic competitors from gaining ground at the expense of the United States. To this end, the U.S. government is seeking to increase efforts to combat corruption and to promote pro-American voices.

In support of media freedom in Hungary, the Department, by means of grants and other assistance, has provided support to NGOs and other organizations to strengthen media literacy and critical thinking skills among the Hungarian population. Moreover, during Secretary Pompeo's visit to Budapest earlier this year, he announced a State Department-funded regional initiative to strengthen media capacity in Central Europe, including Hungary, aimed at increasing investigative journalism and providing training and exchanges.

We hope this information is helpful to you. Please let us know if we may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Elizabeth Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mary Elizabeth Taylor
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Legislative Affairs