

**M. Andre Goodfriend, Charge d’Affaires, a.i. of the U.S. Embassy
Budapest
Interview with *Magyar Nemzet*
August 5, 2014**

The fact that we are able to discuss these issues, and that you are drawing upon information from U.S. government sources as well as U.S. media sources highlights the transparency of the U.S. system - basically it was this curt explanation with which the Charge d’Affaires of the United States Embassy in Budapest took care of the fact that while America is putting its allies under surveillance, torturing POWs, and using police state methods, it is worrying about Hungarian democracy of all things. As regards Viktor Orban’s speech at Baile Tusnad, in his interview with our paper Andre Goodfriend said: in his opinion the Western model is not in crisis. “The Western model still attracts the best and brightest from around the world,” he said.

First of all: Why does the Charge d’Affaires of the United States Embassy decide to speak out publicly on account of the Hungarian Prime Minister’s speech? In my experience that is by far not routine procedure in U.S. diplomacy.

It’s true that there has been great deal of discussion of the Prime Minister’s discourse in Băile Tuşnad, with academics, politicians, journalists and others seeking to understand what was meant by what was said. It has also been fascinating reading the range of interpretations and assessments of its significance. In this regard, we have been actively engaged with the government of Hungary on questions of democratic principles, and have had frank private discussions and made public statements about developments that negatively impact the health of democratic institutions, civil society, and media freedom in Hungary. What also piqued my interest was the discussion of the United States, and the seeming criticism of the values we believe our two societies share.

We certainly welcome the opportunity for this discussion. That is, in fact, a core aspect of U.S. diplomacy in Hungary and in every society where our diplomats are assigned. We discuss the values in which we believe because those values, not just economic interests, bind us together as an international community.

Discussing values outside the closed doors of government meeting rooms has become so important that many ambassadors and chiefs of missions are now using blogs and Twitter. I note that the Prime Minister’s Deputy State Secretary for International Communication maintains a blog, and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Navracsics has begun using Twitter. To help me discuss U.S. perspectives more informally, but still in an official capacity, I began a blog called "Civil Voices" last January. It's online at <http://blogs.usembassy.gov/goodfriend/>. And I began using Twitter, where I'm [@GoodfriendMA](#), on the 4th of July.

Hungarians are always interested in the reasons for eminent critical attention, so allow me one more question. As a comparison, concerning another close but true, not NATO ally of yours. Do you happen to have information on whether, seeing the Palestinian civilian casualties in Gaza, the U.S Ambassador to Jerusalem has initiated an interview in the Israeli media?

While it's hard to equate the situation in Gaza with the situation in Hungary, the U.S. has in fact focused a significant amount of energy, well beyond media interviews, to try to end this conflict. Secretary of State Kerry has travelled to the region numerous times, meeting with senior officials. And President Obama underscored the United States' strong condemnation of Hamas' rocket and tunnel attacks against Israel while also reiterating the United States' serious and growing concern about the rising number of Palestinian civilian deaths and the loss of Israeli lives, as well as the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza.

And now let's talk business. At the beginning of his Baila Tusnad speech, Prime Minister Viktor Orban thanks the Hungarians across the borders for their votes [cast on Fidesz in the Parliamentary elections] declaring they were needed to achieve yet another two third mandate. So far we haven't heard much about the opinion of the US Government about the Hungary institution of dual citizenship, although I can still recall the remark of a colleague of yours who had served in Budapest before the introduction [of dual citizenship]. According to that remark, dual citizenship may be a fundamental right elsewhere; however, in the case of Hungarians across the borders it is a strategic question. What is the U.S. position on that now?

Citizenship, and its incumbent responsibilities and rights, is generally a matter between the individual and the state which grants citizenship. The U.S. focus, with regard to citizenship, when speaking to other countries, is generally that "citizenship" is a universal human right -- everyone has a right to a citizenship. This precept is in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which both the United States and Hungary uphold.

It is for Hungarians to discuss the nature of their own society, and how their society is changed or the complications that arise when it offers Hungarian citizenship to those who don't reside in Hungary and who already have a citizenship elsewhere.

The Prime Minister said that the change of regime must now be treated as an experience and not as a reference [point] any more. How does such a statement resonate in the United States, which became a dominating global power back then, in 1990-91? Do you agree that in view of the above, the starting point for researching the future should rather be the 2008 Western financial crisis?

I'd rather not try to parse the Prime Minister's words with regards to treating something as an "experience" rather than as a "point of reference." Although those who participated in the fall of the Iron Curtain and the regime change of 1989 may now be in their 50s, and those who have 1956 as their personal "point of reference" may now be in their 70s, while those who saw the Hungarian nation tear itself apart during the 1930s and 1940s are now in their 80s and 90s, each period carries lessons that should be remembered.

While it's certainly possible to choose 2008 as the year that changed everything, perhaps rather than choosing a crisis as a point of reference and painting an image of countries as victims of new realities, another recent, more positive point of reference might be 2004, when Hungary regained its identity as a country in the heart of Europe and joined the European Union. Or, perhaps, a very recent point of reference is now, right now, in 2014, as the international community, particularly those countries which subscribe to what might be called "liberal democratic values," including Hungary, are standing united to pit those values against the 19th and early 20th century nationalist expansion values of Russia.

However, it's true, the financial crisis of 2008 also carried lessons, as did financial boom and bust periods before that. The U.S. economic system, for all of its complexity, was able to sustain itself through a major upheaval perhaps exactly because of its diversity and its flexible, liberal approach.

Just a few days ago, on August 1st, President Obama commented that at press conferences during his first term, everybody wanted to ask about the economy and jobs and the housing market. But now... He was able to note that what we did worked. The economy is better. He pointed to the past six months in which more than 200,000 jobs were created --- something that hadn't happened in 17 years. It shows you the power of persistence, and the strength of our system.

With regard to the U.S. as a global power, yes, the U.S. does work hard to develop global partnerships based on common principles and values. We communicate and we engage. We speak out publicly and we speak out in private. Our values and our way of life are there for all to see. The American dream still exists. Thirty percent of the 40.8 million foreign born people residing in the United States in 2012, entered between 2000 and 2009, 7 percent entered since 2010.

There are few statistics that can speak so eloquently to America's continuing attraction, to the continuing attraction of the values and the way of life in the U.S.

The speech mentions that on account of the problems, things can [now] be said in America and in Western Europe that earlier would have been sacrilege. You are an experienced public servant, a diplomat. Is the Western model really in crisis?

No. As noted by our immigration figures and the confidence in our resurging economy, the Western model still attracts the best and brightest from around the world. Whether from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe or South America, the general migration pattern is to the United States and Western Europe. People come seeking not only economic prosperity, but also the rights we value, whether they be freedom of expression, freedom of religion, equality in the workplace, support for innovation, the certainty of rule of law, and so much more. There are certainly other viable economic and societal systems in the world, but few provide the flexibility and endurance necessary to benefit from the ease of communication, travel and commerce possible in the 21st century.

The Prime Minister considers finding a new model to organize the state as the most important task of the future. In the age of globalism and of multi-national companies, that are more powerful than even [whole] countries, and of systems the size of continents, such as the European Union, is it really that important to focus on the state role? Of course, we could say that the unoperational states that have come into being thanks to your [country's] unsuccessful interventions point just to the continued need for the successful state...

Well, this could really be a history discussion. In many ways, there were very globalized systems in the 19th century too, under empires like the Habsburg, the British and the Ottoman. And the nationalist movements that led to the creation of so many new ethnic nation-based states after WWI, including a less ethnically diverse Hungary, set the stage for the turbulent beginning of the 20th century, and of the growing influence of the United States in the world. Our focus, our influence, has been to advocate for people to have a say in their own self-governance.

Some point to the end of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century as Hungary's golden era. It was an era when the population of Hungary was renowned for its diversity, and it benefitted from drawing upon the value of that diversity to excel in the sciences, the arts, music, literature, architecture, etc. It drew upon the voluntary contributions of its proud and diverse citizens to create a beautiful city worthy of a major European capital. The engagement of

a culturally diverse nation in the welfare of its society has also been the strength of the system in the U.S., a country the size of half a continent. A famous motto, more two centuries old, of the United States is "E Pluribus Unum" – out of the many, one. The ability to draw strength and unity from diversity is also the strength of the European Union. And important to that strength, the thing which helps differentiate the new multinational and transnational models from the authoritarian, imperial models of the 19th century, is the enfranchisement of citizens. Citizens, not subjects.

It is this democratic enfranchisement which has also led to a shift in the role of diplomacy, away from the closed-door confines of diplomats and politicians, to discussions with the citizens. In authoritarian systems, where the voices of the citizens don't matter, where the citizens have no influence, then diplomacy can be carried out behind closed doors. But, our preference is to discuss issues openly, with government officials and with the citizens, because we believe that in this age of enfranchised publics, citizens' perceptions are important.

And the role of citizens comes from political states. States and unions of states remain important.

It was also said in Baila Tusnad that there are non-Western and non-liberal models that are successful. It is well-known that the United States finds it hard to swallow if the operability of other models is mentioned, as it is in contrast with the leading role it [the US] lays claim to. Don't you think that this missionary mindset, this rather arrogant attitude has proved to be the biggest impediment to world peace in the past 20 years? Why cannot America make peace with the fact that in other places there are other, different regimes, and respect national sovereignty?

Again, your premise is questionable. In fact, the contrary is more accurate. It is well known that the United States is an advocate of the "marketplace of ideas," of open discussion of political systems and models. We are advocates of dialogue and genuine communication between citizens and their government. While a regime that refuses to tolerate an open dialogue with its citizens and develops a command economy might bring some financial profit to the government in power, we would find it difficult to call such a system successful when it achieves that profit for itself, rather than society at large, and does so through a heavy handed control of the market and a silencing of dissent.

Viktor Orban raising the concept of illiberal democracy that would put an end to the local [in Hungary] practice of the liberal era before 2010, that is, „the stronger one is right“ is, no doubt, unusual. It lists the lack of the representation of the national interest and [the lack of] protection of community property, or the country becoming indebted.

This latter might sound familiar in the United States too. Isn't it possible that the time has really come for revision, to revise fundamentalist liberal dogmas?

It's inaccurate to equate the concept that "the stronger one is right" with liberal democracy. Liberal democracy focuses on the worth and dignity of each individual and the need to protect the fundamental rights of all individuals in a society, especially those in the minority, or in other words those who are not necessarily "strong" at a given moment in time. It is for this reason that we often stress the need to safeguard the "rule of law" within a democracy. Avoiding the pitfall that the stronger side is always right, or that the majority should always have its way is a particular challenge in a system like Hungary's with a unicameral legislature -- where the head of the government also comes from the ruling party. In a unicameral system there are fewer institutional checks and balances than in countries with bicameral legislatures, or a separately elected chief executive. So, in such a system, to avoid falling into the pitfall of having the majority ignore the rights of the minority, a responsible government must work even harder to ensure that the rule of law is respected and that there are adequate checks and balances in place.

The checks and balances that are in place in the U.S. system, with the balance of power between the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judiciary, as well as the debates between the two major U.S. political parties are all very public in the U.S. and around the world. Yet, painful though it might be sometimes, perhaps it is because of these constraints on power in the U.S. that our government has been able to truly represent the interests of our diverse nation, to balance fiscal responsibility with investment in infrastructure and preparedness for crises – and to once again emerge from challenges strengthened by an approach in which citizens value both their rights and their responsibilities – one of which is to speak out and express their concerns to their government.

You are describing a pink dream world. In contrast, your country is not a model democracy. You are putting your allies, Hungary included, under surveillance, torturing detainees, and the large part of the world public calls you, because of your policy of intervention, a police state. Don't think that you simply have no ground for criticism?

The fact that we are able to discuss these issues, and that you are drawing upon information from U.S. government sources as well as U.S. media sources highlights the transparency of the U.S. system. We accept criticism when criticism is due. We are often among the first to criticize ourselves. As noted earlier, our system of checks and balances, as well as a free media and a respected tradition of investigative journalism means that we often have to view ourselves in a very bright, often harsh light. We value the fact that our

legislature can hold our executive branch to account, and that the Supreme Court is able to assess the legality of decisions from the legislature. Checks and balances, transparency in governmental processes, a strong civil society, a tradition of free media and our willingness to try to be a positive model, mean that the actions of the U.S. government often come under harsh scrutiny, and we are used to that. It is our ability to hold ourselves up to criticism, to act on criticism, that also gives us the ability and the responsibility to speak out when we need to do so.

Your [US] diplomats always react sensitively to all news on civil institutions— I think you must have nearly had a heart attack when the Prime Minister spoke about paid political activists and enforcers of foreign interests. And - this is my addition –, this environment is not without common criminals either. Why is it a problem if the Hungarian government wants to see clearly? Is it that hard to understand it from the United States, where the separation of [the difference between] the civil sector and acting as registered foreign agents is taken very seriously?

Civil society, civil activism, institutions drawing their strength from concerned citizens, have been an important element of U.S. and Hungarian society for generations.

Civil society played a critical, profound role in Hungary's 1989 regime change. Many of Hungary's political movements—including Fidesz—have their roots in civil society, all representing the interests of Hungarian society, regardless of the source of funding. As those who have worked with civil society organizations will know, civil society helps citizens play an active role in their society.

As I noted earlier, citizens in the United States see it not only as their right but as their responsibility to hold their government accountable.

Just as governments have a responsibility to safeguard the rights of their citizens, citizens have a responsibility to ensure that their government is acting as it should. Citizens accomplish this through civil activism, through non-governmental institutions, which are independent of the government they are holding accountable. As members of the OSCE, both the U.S. and Hungary share a commitment to a viable and independent civil society.

Civil society at times, and by its nature, is political. When citizens give feedback to their government, they are acting politically. When advocacy and human rights organizations speak out on issues of importance, they represent an active citizenry taking part in the political life of their country. Labeling civil society organizations "political actors" is not a critique of civil society, it is a depiction of how broad and valuable their role can be.

Civil society can receive funding from a range of sources. In the United States and many other countries, private citizens donate their own money to support civil society. Sometimes governments will provide funding to civil society, although there is always a risk that in such cases, the non-governmental organization will become "quasi-governmental." And, in some cases other governments or international institutions will help fund non-governmental institutions that support general principles, such as human rights, good governance, etc.

While many of the NGOs in the U.S. are funded by the donations of private U.S. citizens, many NGOs also receive funding from outside the U.S., even from Hungary and the Hungarian government, without these NGOs being considered to be foreign agents.

We do have a law, the Foreign Agents Registration Act which requires organizations and individuals who are representing foreign interests to register as foreign agents, but simply receiving foreign funding does not make the organization a foreign agent. Generally it is only considered a foreign agent in cases where the organization or individual is explicitly controlled by a foreign country and carrying out the instructions of that foreign country in an attempt to influence the policy of the country where the agent is located.

Baselessly accusing civil society groups of being "foreign agents" or "enemies of the state" intimidates and prevents an independent civil society from carrying out its legitimate role. We know that as a member of the EU and of the OSCE (which has also raised its concerns about the intimidation of civil society in Hungary) Hungary is pledged to working with a vibrant and independent civil society sector, which is why we have been concerned with recent statements and government actions which obstruct the free operation of civil society in Hungary.

Conservative British philosopher Roger Scruton recently said in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences that "there IS a conspiracy against countries". He, e.g; attributed to the Soros network that [the international media] are writing about Hungary becoming "fascist". They [Soros] supported Bajnai's movement too. Is not an intervention?

It would not be constructive to comment on a phrase taken out of context. However, the word conspiracy in English suggests people acting in secret. In Hungarian too, the word "összeesküvés" implies that there is some sort of secret pact. However, in an open, transparent society, we form alliances and work towards agreed common goals in the open. Working together with countries, publicly, in pursuit of common goals and shared values, and empowering private citizens in those societies to pursue those same goals and

values, is something we do very publicly, very openly. It is the opposite of conspiracy. We advocate for the active and open participation of citizens in their country's system of government – all citizens, including those who did not vote for a government that happens to be in power at any given time. And sometimes, it is the very openness and independence of those working on behalf of civil society which governments object to.

George Soros is supporting civil organizations that exclusively attack the right wing government. Some of these organizations were supported by the Norway Grants. We are talking about hundreds of millions of forints.

This appears to be a statement, and an inaccurate one at that, rather than a question. I recall that in the 1980s, funding went to support the development of open societies and democratic movements, which by their nature empower private citizens in the face of authoritarian regimes --- whether they be on the left (as was the case in Hungary) or on the right. Rather than favoring or opposing "left-wing" or "right-wing" government, promoting civil society promotes democratic governance, empowering people. Authoritarian regimes on the left or on the right oppose an empowered citizenry.

At the end of his discourse the Prime Minister says: the essence of the future is that anything may happen, and in that context he referred to the shooting down of the plane in Ukraine, which he called an act of terrorism, and to the lawsuit to be started against President Obama by the US legislation. This speech is again in sharp contrast with the post-Cold War Fukuyama vision of the ultimate victory of liberal Western democracy and of the consumer society. No doubt you [Americans] have more tools to look into the future with. Can really anything happen? I, for example, am most interested in whether, on account of the Russian-American wrestling match, the Ukraine bloodshed will escalate to Central Europe, and in that, to my country.

Unfortunately, we have no crystal ball with which to foretell the future. Even what Francis Fukuyama writes today is different than what he wrote in 1989, in the immediate, inspiring aftermath of regime change throughout this region. Perhaps during that heady time, many might have said that anything can happen. However, unless we want to just sit back and watch history unfold before us like a bad movie, with no internal logic, in which truly anything can happen, we must be engaged and play a role in what happens. This is, in fact, the thrust, as I understand it, of Fukuyama's more recent writings.

As President Obama said at the August 1st press conference I mentioned earlier, "Part of the reason why America remains indispensable, part of the essential ingredient in American leadership is that we're willing to plunge in and try ..."

And this positive willingness to try has been fundamental to our approach from the beginnings in 1776 when Thomas Jefferson laid out in the Declaration of Independence why it was that the American people needed to shape their own future. If we just sit there and watch, perhaps, yes, anything can happen; but, if we take an interest in the world in which we live, we must be willing to plunge in and try”

It is this willingness to try that enabled us to successfully tackle financial crisis after financial crisis, whether in the 1930s, the 1970s or the first decade of this century; it shapes our positive attitude toward the future and fuels innovation; it attracts allies wanting to partner with a country with a “can-do” spirit, and it attracts immigrants seeking the “American dream,” it prompts us to be the first to speak out when we have concerns --- we are willing to plunge in and try.

And it underpins our commitment to civil society --- these are citizens who are willing to plunge in and try.

We don’t always get it right, and we seek to learn from our mistakes, and then we try again. And in this way, we don’t just let anything happen, we work individually and as a team to try to shape what happens

At the end of our „critical interview” please allow me to ask a straight question: Is there a limit set by your country on Hungary’s taking a separate road the crossing of which would result in active counter-measures by the United States? Can our insistence on Paks 2, on South Stream lead to US sanctions?

Each country in the EU takes its own road to a certain extent, as does the United States, while also working together for shared security and prosperity. Working as we do, within these alliances and economic frameworks helps us avoid even the talk of sanctions. Hungary is an EU partner, a NATO ally and a fellow member of the OSCE. Americans and Hungarians have a long shared history, nearly 250 years, of supporting each other and standing for common values.

Your question focuses on energy issues. Hungary has worked closely with us and others in Europe towards regional energy security. Energy security means diversity of sources, fuel types, and routes. We have noted in the past that Paks offers Hungary one source and one supplier, and draws financial resources away from greater energy diversification and investment. Because the full Paks agreement has not been made public, Hungarians do not yet know the details of their increased energy dependence on Russia. We have not seen the agreement, either -- and remain concerned by the swift and private manner of its execution. Transparency on this topic would, frankly, have been easier and more beneficial to Hungary than secrecy.

We also note that Hungary has been coordinating within the EU to apply sanctions on Russia for its ongoing destabilizing activity in Ukraine. Our position on Ukraine is the same as Hungary's. We both condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea, the ongoing violence in the border regions, and the efforts of Russian-backed separatists to destabilize democratic Ukraine. We share Hungary's outrage at the attack on a commercial airliner. We support the decision of the EU to impose "stage three" sanctions, and we appreciate that Hungary is part of the EU consensus on this. We stand with Hungary and all NATO allies to oppose continued violence, and to call for concrete steps by Russia to de-escalate this conflict. The future of this crisis will be characterized by our alliance, our consensus, and our unity. Defense Minister Hende reminded us all in his recent speech that there is no peace without security.

And last, a short question. When will the new US Ambassador arrive in Budapest? Is the Ambassador going to be Colleen Bell?

Ambassador designate Bell's nomination is currently pending confirmation in the Senate, along with the nominations of over 40 other ambassadorial nominees. We therefore cannot predict when she will arrive in Budapest.