

# Interview With Hungarian Journalists

*July 6, 1989*

## President's Visit to Hungary

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. And I don't have to tell you how much we all appreciate this possibility of your time.

As you probably know, the Hungarian people are looking forward with great anticipation and, I have to tell you, with great expectations to this first visit of an acting American President. And being a sentimental nation, as we are, I would like to lead up with the first question. I was wondering, as most Hungarians are, what ideas come to your mind when you think of our nation, our country, which actually never played a significant role in American policy? Does your visit signify a change in American policy toward Hungary?

The President. Well, it does signify a change in the sense that it is important that an American President salute the Hungarian people and salute the changes that are taking place in Hungary. It is not an American President's role to say to those in another country, you have to have your system this way, matching our system, or else we can't do business with you. That is not my role. I have respect for, and enough experience to have respect for, the internal affairs of another country.

But as we see the movement towards more openness, if you will, and towards participation by the people more in the political process, and by the movement towards an economic system that we think eventually will benefit the people of Hungary, we should salute that change. So, it's historic in the sense of an affection level for the people of Hungary to those that focus on it being here. Nobody's ever challenged that recognition that Hungary went through times where officially we had great differences. But then as things move forward in terms of reform and change and openness, we salute that.

I have a combination of things in my mind as we move into this visit, just as I did when I was Vice President, but the evolution since then is even more marked. And I'm looking forward to meeting those of the new leadership that I don't know -- three out of the four that I do not know. Mr. Grosz [General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party], I met, of course, as you know, when he was here.

And I noticed the passing of Mr. Kadar [former First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party]. Well, there were mixed feelings about Mr. Kadar in the Hungarian-American community in this country. But as you look at the whole record, one points out the area where we had differences; but then one points also, in his death, with respect to the changes that he was able to implement. And we might get all kinds of argument in our political right or our political left about Mr. Kadar, but I look at him as a man who served his country. There was a time when we were frustrated and at odds back in the midfifties, as we all know. There's no point hiding that. But in death, give the man the credit for the

things that he did accomplish. And he was most hospitable to me and able to discuss frankly the changes that were going there.

And so, I would hope to conduct myself as President not to exacerbate differences but to look to the future and where we can work in more openness together.

#### Hungary-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, President Gorbachev had a very similar statement yesterday by saying that the Soviet Union is ready to accept the political system, whatever the Hungarian and the Polish people want. So, my question is that the United States would support with the same enthusiasm a new Hungarian government next year after free election if this government will be a leftist Communist-Socialist coalition, let's say?

The President. I have respect for the internal affairs of a country. We are not about to try to dictate how a demonstrably free election should come out. That's a matter for the people of Hungary. And I will, as President of the United States, deal with whoever is freely and openly elected and, in the process, welcome the fact that there will be evolution of the election process and party process, whatever happens. But it would be inappropriate for the President of the United States to try to fine-tune for the people of Hungary how they ought to eat -- how the cow ought to eat the cabbage, as we say in the United States. That's up to your people, and we will deal with whoever is elected.

Now, I also think that you have to recognize that as the economic system evolves towards more openness and more privatization, for example, that makes it much easier for the United States to be a full partner in economic development and economic reform.

#### Eastern Europe-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, the differentiation policy of the United States is basically -- it was basically a strategy of fighting communism in that part of the world. Now a new type of government is being formed in Hungary and also in Poland. My question is whether -- is there a possibility to develop this policy of differentiation into a policy of support and contribution to East European democracies?

The President. Yes, and I think you've already seen that. And as I say, I salute Hungary for being in the forefront of the change that resulted in our stated policy of differentiation. So, I would say that the changes in Poland in an economic sense are coming, but they're coming after what Hungary has done. There are other countries in Eastern Europe who have not begun to reflect the kind of change that we see in Hungary in the forefront, and with Poland coming along very strong now.

And what I would like to do is keep our standards, the way we keep our principles in shape -- say this is what we aspire to for peoples all over the world in terms of freedom and democracy and these things, but then draw a fine line on -- here's the internal affair of Hungary now; here's the internal affair of Poland. Respect it; but still encourage the

kinds of economic formulation that will result in our ability to help more. But I'd say the answer to your question is a simple yes. We will move forward with countries that can do what Hungary has done and is trying to do.

Incidentally -- I don't think I'm betraying a confidence -- I had a very interesting phone call last night from [Australian] Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who has just been in Hungary. And I must say, he was very complimentary of the leaders with whom he met. And he was encouraging me, as the President of the United States, to go with an entirely open mind. And then he said: ``If you conclude as I have that there is an enormous opportunity for more closeness between Hungary and the West, or countries like Australia and the United States, let's all pitch in together and do what we can to help."

I think it would be a tribute to the people in Hungary and the government officials that he came away with such a very positive view of what he had seen and what his conversations led to. It was unsolicited. He just called me and said: ``You're going to Hungary. I want you to know how strongly I feel about it." And, of course, you know how I feel about Bob Hawke, because he was here and I had a chance to say it publicly.

#### Conventional Arms Reductions in Europe

Q. Mr. President, 2 months ago in Brussels, you made sweeping proposals to release conventional arms. How does Eastern Europe and Hungary fit into your security assessment, and how does it fit into the Soviet-American relationship?

The President. Well, I think what we proposed at NATO -- total solidarity agreeing to the U.S. initiative that quickly became the NATO proposal. I think with that on the table, it should be very reassuring to the people of Hungary. And it is a proposal that has received a reasonable comment from Mr. Gorbachev. It is a proposal that offers great hope for reducing tensions in Europe, and in both East and West. And it is a proposal that I look forward to discussing with the leaders in Hungary because I will convince them, I think, that it is in the interest of all countries, West and East, to see us promptly -- and I use that word very carefully -- but promptly, with these reductions in all these categorical conventional arms. They're the most expensive. They are destabilizing if you have lack of parity there.

And I'm very excited about the challenge that lies ahead. And the challenge is to meet these timetables and to move these troops out. And some of it's U.S. troops coming home; and some of it is Soviet troops going out. Because I think if you have a balance between Soviet and U.S., the two largest powers, that reduces tension more than if it's just a reduction of Eastern forces or Western forces. So, it's an exciting proposal, and very candidly, I'm pleased the way the Soviets have received it, although they obviously have not endorsed it the way we put it on the table.

#### Economic Assistance for Eastern Europe

Q. Mr. President, a question that intrigues most Hungarians -- and Poles, for that matter, too: It seems, so far, the expectations and the need for short- and long-term Western financial economic aid might exceed by far the amount that the West is willing, or can do at the moment. I was wondering, are there merely economic restraints on your side, or also political considerations?

The President. There are no political constraints today that I can see. There's none that I can't handle as President of the United States with the Congress. And I say that with great confidence; and I don't say that about many subjects because Congress, as you know, can be very recalcitrant -- but the only constraints are economic. And, yes, we are burdened with our own economic problems here that I'm not going to ask the Hungarian people to be sympathetic to because we're a very wealthy country. But I'm going to be sure that your leaders know that there are certain confines within which I have to operate, but they are not political as it relates to Congress.

I think support for what's happening in Hungary is strong in the United States Congress. And that the borders -- what's happening when the tearing down of the barriers on the borders has gotten wide acclaim in this country -- I mean, strong support. The trying on the part of Hungary to move towards more of a market-oriented economy -- that has been receiving, and will continue to receive, strong support. The fact that Hungary is moving in its own way with political reform is getting strong support.

So, I don't think there is any problem in terms of support from the Congress, as it relates to Hungary politically. Now, people want to see performance. Those that are in charge of the purse strings on Capitol Hill want to be sure that the economic performance matches our expectations if we're going to give money or other countries are going to give money.

But I don't think Poland is looking for a handout. They're looking for a hand up, and I wish that I was going to be in a freefall in terms of the funds that we could bring to bear on the problem. We aren't. But we will try to have some ideas and some funds that can be helpful in some way to Hungary.

#### Eastern European and Soviet Reforms

Q. Mr. President, but there is one particular problem with Congress. Countries are put in different baskets, and Hungary is still in the basket of no-market economics -- countries with no-market economies, countries with nondemocratic system, and so on. And Hungary is approaching now a status when these labels are somewhat different now. And can you foresee a time when a Warsaw Pact country can be called as a free, democratic system with a free-market economy?

The President. Well, I can certainly foresee such a time with great hope in my heart, and we're seeing dynamic change taking place today. We keep talking about Hungary and Poland, but they're the most visible example of this, Hungary having been in the forefront of the economic change, before Poland. But I can foresee that day, and I can foresee a

rapid recognition of this change by the Congress, who has, as you say, with the support of administrations, placed these differentiating barriers on the various countries.

But we have our principles, and I don't think they're very much different than what the man on the street aspires to in Hungary. And I will be holding high our principles and saying, look, to the degree change can accommodate privatization or more market for us or more openness towards the West, then we can do more. And I think I have to do that. I don't want to go there and look like -- that there are no differences at all.

But I'm an optimist about the developments in Eastern Europe -- and with the Soviet Union, I might add. I'm an optimist, and I will do my best as President of the United States to help facilitate change. I want to see perestroika succeed in the Soviet Union. We're not dragging our feet on it. I'll use this occasion with you leading journalists to make the point: I want to see it succeed. And I am not going to Hungary to try to complicate life for Mr. Gorbachev. And nor do I suspect when he goes to Paris that he is there simply to complicate life for the United States. He is not, and I know that.

So, I will be there talking, however, about what we believe in. We're the United States, and I am the President of the United States, and I feel strongly on certain things that relate to the rights of the people to be heard and all of that. They don't want me to come there with some subdued message. I'm going there with a strong message.

#### Eastern Europe-U.S. Relations

Q. At least twice in its modern history, the Hungary people turned for help to the people of the United States -- at least twice. It was in 1848 and in 1956, and frankly saying, the American reaction was disappointing in those cases. My -- maybe a little apathetic -- question is -- --

The President. No, no.

Q. -- -- does this great country feel any kind of responsibility for the future of East Europe and for the future of Hungary?

The President. I can't say responsibility for -- I've got to be careful on translation. No, I don't feel a responsibility for it, but I do feel a great empathy for the change and an affection for the heartbeat of the Hungarian people.

You mentioned 1956, and I know exactly what you're talking about, and I'm old enough to remember. A lot of our kids don't remember this -- people standing up for their freedoms and all. On the other hand, I think a country like the United States ought not to overpromise, ought not to overexhort for others to be like us, and thus cause problems to be worse for the people.

And I don't know what was expected in 1956 by the man on the street, but if the expectation was military confrontation with the Soviet Union, that expectation was,

regrettably, too high. And yet we can identify with the kids that were at the barricades. We can identify with the aspiration for more freedom or more voice in their system; so can the people in the Soviet Union. Look at the changes that are taking place. So, my goal is not to go back and relive those times in the past but to salute the change in the present and then look into the future. And that's how I feel about it.

They asked me a question in the interview with the Polish journalists about young people who aspire to come to this country. And, look, we want people to aspire to come to the United States. I want the Statue of Liberty to stand for something all over the world. So it was the Statue of Liberty that momentarily held her arm up there in Tiananmen Square. But I also would say to the kids in Eastern Europe: Look, you're living in an exciting time. You're living in a time of dynamic change. And you love your country. And you're Hungarian, or you're Polish. And, yes, our doors are going to be open, and God forbid the day that they slam closed. But you've got an exciting future now, you 21-year-old guy at some university there in Hungary, and be part of the change, be part of what's happening in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union.

And I say that hopefully, without looking like the welcome mat will be pulled back, because it won't be. But if I were a kid, 21 now and were living in Hungary, I'd say, God, this is exciting. I can be a part of all this. I might even get to be President.

Mr. Fitzwater. We've going to have to break, I'm afraid. A final question.

Q. May I have a last one?

The President. Yes.

Economic Assistance for Eastern Europe

Q. Mr. President, after your Budapest visit, you will stop in Paris with the seven nations to discuss how to help the Polish and Hungarian economy. Would you give us an idea what you expect and how the West together help these two nations?

The President. Well, I feel funny talking about it before I've met with them because the leaders of the G - 7 [the group of seven nations participating in the economic summit] are all very conscious of their own responsibilities and for their own economies and for working together -- for a decision coming out of the G - 7 to be a joint decision. So, I don't want to get out in front of the others.

But I would say this: that how the West can interact with Hungary or with Poland will be a star item on our agenda. And it isn't something that the U.S. is forcing on to the agenda, as strong as I feel about it. It's something that we touched on at the last NATO meeting, actually, and that subsequently other leaders have indicated to us that they want to continue to discuss. So, it will be treated there. I can't tell you what I think will happen. A lot of the discussion will revolve around the multilateral support, I'm sure, through multilateral agencies. And again, we come up against two thoughts. One is, what kinds of

reforms are necessary for us to give all-out support from these multilateral institutions?  
And then the other one is: How much money is available; what are the funds?

Q. Mr. President, by thanking you, let me ask a very last question.

The President. You got it.

Q. Like Sarah McClendon.

The President. But you don't shout and wave your arms around.

Hungarian Political Reforms

Q. You said the cold war began in Eastern Europe; it will end there. What can we do for the Americans and your new junior partner, Hungary, to have the cold war really end in Eastern Europe?

The President. Continue the kinds of changes and openness that is taking place. When Bob Hawke told me he met with opposition leaders and they were fully engaged with the Government in terms of discussion about the freedom of the election process to come -- all of that is strong; all of that is good.

We've got a two-party system -- sometimes it seems like a twenty-party system, all the factions in the Republican Party, all in the Democratic. We're not going to say to you the only way you can have good relations with the United States is to have a two-party system and call one of them Republicans and another Democrats. I wouldn't inflict that on anybody. But I do think that, as the dynamics of the political change takes place, why, this plays right into the enthusiastic, welcoming hands of the United States, of our Congress, and of our administration.

So, my thing is: Keep it going. Keep it going, and it doesn't have to be to the detriment of anybody else. It's just what is best for the people in Hungary; what is the best for that surge of freedom and independence that Hungarians feel and have always felt. I mean, how do they participate the most and fulfill their dreams?

I can't wait to get there.

Note: The interview began at 10:22 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The following journalists participated in the interview: Miklos Blaho of Magyar Nemzet, Pal Bokor of Magyar Hirlap, Andras Heltai of MTI-Hungarian News Agency, and Andras Kereszty of Nepszabadsag. Marlin Fitzwater was Press Secretary to the President. A tape was not available for verification of the contents of the interview. The interview was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on July 9.