

IOM Diaspora Ministerial Conference

Geneva, 18 and 19 June 2013

Excellencies, Mr. Chairman, distinguished speakers and participants!

First of all, I would like to thank you for the kind invitation. It is a great pleasure to be here today among such distinguished experts of diaspora policies. I am delighted to be able to listen to such high standard, informative presentations.

Hungary is in a special situation since one-third of the Hungarian population lives beyond the country's borders. In our case, we can make a distinction between Hungarians living in the neighboring countries, and those living in other parts of the world. The Hungarian government's policy for Hungarian communities abroad focuses on both. In my presentation today I will not elaborate on the Hungarian communities living in the neighboring countries because they belong to the group of autochthonous minority communities, as they live in the territories that used to belong to Hungary before the First World War. Our topic today is the Hungarian diaspora living in the United States, Western Europe and elsewhere in the world. They are facing specific problems which need be addressed differently.

The policy of our government for Hungarian communities abroad considers the strengthening of mutual trust and confidence between Hungarians living in the kin-state and other parts of the world a priority. Therefore, it is based upon openness.

It has been Hungary's long-lasting debt to address its diaspora communities living in Western Europe and overseas, and make them feel that they are part of the Hungarian nation. The migration of Hungarians started already in the beginning of the 19th century and took place in several major phases. The last great wave of migration was triggered by the Hungarian revolution of 1956. Hungarians, who left the country in 1956 established traditional diaspora organizations, established their own newspapers, churches, small Hungarian villages or even urban districts within the target countries. At the same time let me take the opportunity to thank the IOM's predecessor, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration for its invaluable assistance that was provided to thousands of Hungarian refugees. Nowadays, the modern economic migration constitutes our biggest challenge, since we would like new

migrants to either join the traditional diaspora organizations or set up new ones which Hungary can incorporate into its diaspora policy.

Twenty years after the political transitions of 1989/90, the interests of the Hungarian diaspora are receiving due attention in policies affecting Hungarian communities abroad. We have launched numerous new institutions, programs and initiatives in order to strengthen our relationship with the Hungarian diaspora and help them preserve and nurture their national identity and cultural heritage.

As far as I am concerned, the most important measure we have taken so far was the introduction of the *simplified naturalization procedure*. The procedure enables Hungarians to acquire the Hungarian citizenship no matter where they live in the world, without having to leave their country of residence. More and more Hungarians are taking the advantage of the simplified naturalization procedure, and its administration is going smoothly. We believe that the opportunity of acquiring citizenship through a simplified procedure further strengthens the Hungarian nation's unity with constitutional and legal guarantees.

We have also established the *Hungarian Diaspora Council* which is an independent forum of organizations for Hungarians throughout the world. It created a historical connection and cooperation between Hungarian organizations dispersed all over the world, establishing a community that includes churches, civil society and cultural institutions, associations and the representatives of scout groups. The Council pays special attention to the needs and interests of the Hungarian diaspora, and serves as an independent representation for them. The first meeting of the Diaspora Council took place in November 2011, with the participation of the delegates of 49 different Hungarian diaspora organizations. Diaspora representatives came to Budapest from all continents in order to share their experiences, problems and proposals with us and with each other. The organizations elected the board of the Council on a geographical basis, the members of which are in constant touch with the Hungarian government. The second, enhanced meeting of the Hungarian Diaspora Council took place in October 2012, this time with the participation of 58 member organizations and 3 observer members.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me present you a new program. The Hungarian Government launched the *Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Scholarship Program* in January 2013, as a cultural mission among Hungarians living abroad. The program seeks to foster national cohesion and to promote the Hungarian diaspora communities' cooperation and communication with

Hungary. In the frameworks of the program, volunteers travel to diaspora communities in order to assist in their ongoing cultural and community programs, such as Hungarian language courses, folk dance groups, weekend schools, scouting and other activities which help them to preserve their Hungarian heritage and identity. The 8 months long program started in March and will end in October 2013, with the participation of 47 volunteers hosted in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Latin-America, Australia, Israel and South-Africa.

To conclude, I am confident that the views and suggestions reflected in all contributions at this conference regarding the diaspora policies will prove to be useful for every participant. Conferences like this always serve as an excellent opportunity to share individual experiences. In closing, let me call your attention to the international conference on diaspora policies that we will organize in Budapest in September. I hope our conference will be interesting and constructive for many states which are currently discovering the potentials of their diaspora communities.

Thank you all for your kind attention!