

Dear Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

First, I would like to express my gratitude to the Smithsonian Institution for organizing this event every year and for inviting Hungary to participate in 2013. This is a wonderful tradition that through the universal language of culture greatly strengthens and fosters the friendship and understanding between various nations and their peoples. It is a great honor for my country to be here and to have the opportunity to present the unique and rich Hungarian culture, art, and folk life traditions to visitors from America and all around the world.

The relationship and friendship between the United States and Hungary is a very special one. The history of our nations has been intertwined for a long time. The first largest wave of Hungarian immigrants came to America in 1849. Our great national hero, Lajos Kossuth was greeted here in America upon his visit with the warmest reception. Our forty-niners fought in the civil war. Several of the greatest Hungarian scientists and artist lived and became important parts of world history here in America. The US opened its doors to the refugees of the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Since the democratic transition in 1989, we have developed close and successful cooperation in several important areas. The United States and Hungary are important strategic allies and share fundamental cultural values, deep historic ties, and a dedication to the promotion of individual human rights, protected and exercised through democratic governance. The United States is also a special country for us, as the largest Hungarian diaspora today lives here, almost 1, 5 million Hungarian Americans, who have become important members of American society while also cherishing and nourishing their Hungarian roots and traditions.

The foundation I represent here today, The Hungary Initiatives Foundation, was established by the Hungarian government to deepen this valuable historic relationship and friendship between our countries. Our mission is to build lasting value by reviving and strengthening the cultural, educational, and emotional bonds between the United States and Hungary as well as the large and diverse Hungarian American community and its mother nation. We promote cooperation and understanding between our great nations, thereby fostering democracy, freedom, human rights, and human dignity the dearest values of our history and our peoples. The Foundation is focused on supporting cultural, educational and scholarly activities as well as programs that boost interaction and cooperation between Hungarian and American citizens. It is symbolic that the first program our Foundation supports is the Smithsonian Folklife Festival; it will be the first important step towards our great mission of deepening the understanding and ties between our great nations.

So, I thank you one more time for this opportunity and I wish everyone a wonderful 10 days, full of new adventures, new experiences, and new friendships.