

Prepared Statement for the Record “Democracy and the NATO Alliance: Upholding our Shared Democratic Values”

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Chairman Keating, Ranking Member Kinzinger, Distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for holding this hearing and inviting me to testify before you on an issue that I believe is fundamental to American security and to our role as a leader of the democratic community of nations. It is a particular honor to be here today because Representatives Keating and Kinzinger have been two of the most principled voices in calling for a reinvigoration of democracy and the NATO Alliance as we contend with an era of authoritarian resurgence. On May 8th they both spoke powerfully at an event hosted by German Marshall Fund and the Transatlantic Democracy Working Group on the need to continue fighting for freedom and the ideals we value most, emphasizing this is in America’s interest. Representative Keating asked a pointed question this event, “What do we have that Russia and China don’t have? A coalition, NATO, that has resulted in 70 years of prosperity and peace.”

This year is NATO’s 75th birthday and the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall; these anniversaries could have marked the success of the transatlantic project and the triumph of democracy. Instead, it is clear that after seven decades as the world’s preeminent military alliance, NATO’s future is in danger, facing urgent challenges that require immediate attention, including a recommitment to democratic values as a foundation of our security. The period of relative peace, prosperity, and stability between the end of World War II, through the Cold War, lasted up until 2008 when it was upended by the economic crisis.

French president Emmanuel Macron said starkly in an interview with *The Economist* that Europe cannot trust America to defend NATO allies and that “we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO.” While his rhetoric is designed to shock and is not constructive, it is true to say that the alliance is at a dangerous inflection point and that trust needs to be restored.

As we grapple with this era of authoritarian resurgence which threatens the stability and values of the transatlantic alliance, it is important to humbly take stock of how we arrived here. Similarly, it is incumbent for all of us who care about the transatlantic alliance to hold the US accountable to its own ideals both at home and in the foreign policy it conducts in the world. Today is an important opportunity to do just that.

NATO and the Western architecture face internal and external threats.

NATO was founded for collective action in the face of external threats mainly from the Soviet Union. The success of NATO through the Cold War led us all to a place where a Europe “whole, free and at peace” became a realistic goal after the fall of communism. Moscow has presented a threat to NATO since its inception, seeking to undermine its strength in overt and covert ways. Russia in recent years has been increasingly aggressive, violating maritime and airspace laws, bilateral agreements, treaties, and other norms.

In 2010 we began to see a shift in Russia and in Europe. Russia saw opportunity to stoke divisions in Europe, and exploit fault-lines. There were valid issues and concerns with how the establishment and so-called elites handled the drivers of discontent – the financial and refugee crises. Russia did not need to create the issues, but it did stand to benefit.

The European refugee crisis was full blown by 2015 and bolstered far right forces and their fear-mongering. Antisemitism and xenophobia were on the rise. Europe faced an existential identity crisis, torn between nationalist and integrationist forces, which was galvanizing political upheaval. The sense of democratic inevitability that Europeans had taken for granted since the fall of the Berlin Wall has been shattered. Democracy is not a linear process, it can move forward and backward.

The Russian goal to weaken the EU took several forms: recruitment of European leaders and parties who would help further the Russian goal of European disintegration and stoking divisions and separation initiatives like Brexit. The Kremlin's online disinformation campaign has been perhaps its most insidious and effective tactic – not only has it amplified extremist political opinions or conspiracy theories, but it has increased distrust in democratic institutions.

In Central and Eastern Europe, authoritarian trends are encouraged and supported by the Kremlin. Since Russia's meddling in the U.S. Presidential election of 2016, Russia has continued its attack on Western elections and we can expect that it will only increase. The European Commission announced in June, after the European parliamentary election, that the EU experienced "continued and sustained disinformation activity by Russian sources aiming to suppress turnout and influence voter preferences."¹ This is the new norm, the West should expect Russia to continue this assault as they have not faced adequate consequences.

It should have come as no surprise that beginning in 2014, twenty-five years after the end of the Cold War, NATO again saw fundamental shifts in the security setting, challenging the NATO alliance. Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014, a part of sovereign Ukraine, was a decisive shift – Russia had seized territory of another by force, violating the U.N. Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Alas it was not enough of a turning point for the transatlantic alliance, which has not acted quickly, decisively, or with sufficient resolve in dealing with Russian aggression. The U.S. and Europe did not fully appreciate the scope of Moscow's ambition. Russia preyed on areas where the US and Europe were not in alliance, had vulnerabilities, and lacked the will to respond.

Russia and China have joined in a marriage of convenience, jointly interested in undermining the strength and cohesion of the transatlantic alliance. China's economic might, global influence, and technological innovations provide governments with an alternative, undemocratic system of governance. China is becoming increasingly influential yet China's leaders have seemingly not yet had political ambitions in the same way as Russia. But they are happy to benefit from Russia's dirty work. Between the U.S. and Europe, there seems to be an agreement that China's rise does pose a threat to the liberal world order, but there seems to be a disagreement on how to respond to China.

What Russia wants on the other hand, is bring chaos to the transatlantic system and destabilize democratic institutions. This is not a new insight, but it is worth emphasizing.

¹ European Commission press release, June 14, 2019. https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-2914_en.htm

NATO has been tested before by external challenges and emerged revitalized and refocused. In the period after 1989-1991, NATO faced fundamental challenges and adapted. If the transatlantic alliance musters the political will and mobilizes collective action, this is a winnable proposition.

Threats Within the Alliance

NATO has been less prepared to deal with internal attacks on its democratic commitments by member states. That there are illiberal leaders of NATO members who are actively steering their countries away from democracy is an existential crisis for the alliance. The idea of collective security - that where there is a threat to one ally, there is a threat to all - should also apply to the threats that come from within.

The emergence of self-styled illiberal states across Europe presents a challenge to Western collective action in an era of authoritarian resurgence. Far-right populist parties, many with illiberal tendencies, have gained a toehold or the majority in 23 of 28 EU member states' parliamentary systems.²

While there is an abundance of examples democratic deterioration among NATO member states, I will only focus on a few today which illustrate why illiberalism is a cancer that weakens the strength of the alliance and our security. Prominent illustrations include Turkey's descent into authoritarianism, Poland and Hungary's illiberal regression, and endemic corruption in certain NATO states.

Turkey

President Erdoğan has taken a sledge hammer to all elements of democracy in Turkey since the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and the coup attempt in 2016; a complete crackdown on free expression and assembly, mass arrests of dissidents, and a complete takeover of rule of law, including constitutional reforms that centralized power in the presidency. Turkey is no longer a free and democratic country.

Poland

Poland's decline has been startling as it had been a particularly promising young democracy. It is important to note that there are important differences between Hungary and Poland, which are often lumped together, yet there are similarities. Jaroslaw Kaczynski has spoken reverentially about emulating Viktor Orbán's 'success' of illiberalism in Hungary by creating his own "Budapest on the Vistula."

In 2015 after the Law and Justice party won the majority, it has turned the country toward nationalism, aided by a complementary process of historical revisionism and a campaign to undermine democratic institutions. Beginning with the Constitutional Tribunal, the ruling party began to deconstruct, step by step the entire judicial system and crack down on independent media and civil society. The media environment is of particular concern; the goal pursued by the ruling party seems to be total domination of the national narrative by subjugating media to the government's agenda.

The Law and Justice government as part of its ethno-nationalist strategy has been pursuing historical revisionism to penalize any factual discussion of Polish individuals who collaborated with the Nazi regime in its efforts to kill off 90% of the pre-war Polish Jewish population. A Polish human rights lawyer reported to me recent instances of anti-Semitism that originated from and were tolerated by the Polish government and judiciary. For example, The Minister of Justice, Zbigniew Ziobro, sponsored a

² Jon Stone, "Spain Elections: Right-Wing Populists and Eurosceptics Now Represented in 23 out of 28 EU Member States," *Independent*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/spain-elections-far-right-party-eu-member-states-vox-parliament-a8891706.html>.

conference featuring some of the most notorious Polish anti-Semites, including Dr. Ewa Kurek.³ She and other "experts" who were paid by the government spoke of "complete passivity and collaboration of Jews during the Holocaust" to partly explain "the size of the Holocaust."

Some in Poland say they fear their country has already crossed a point of no return; the results of the European parliamentary elections may have conclusively taken Poland out of the group of liberal democracies. And yet, I think there is hope. Poland's government is not as porous to Russian influence, it has an effective ombudsman's office, and Polish courts have found success in protecting the independence of the judiciary by referring cases to the Court of Justice of the European Union. Where there has been mobilization to roll back repressive measures, where Polish and international pro-democracy actors have pushed back together, as happened with the so-called Holocaust law, they were able to successfully counter the government's anti-democratic efforts.

Hungary

As we assess the past decade, when we talk about threats to liberal democracy in Europe, the conversation always starts and ends with Hungary. After the fall of the Berlin wall and Soviet control, Hungary was a promising example of democratic development and Viktor Orbán was a promising young democrat – but the roots were weak and the Western community underestimated what it would take for democracy to become healthy in Hungary. Hungary is no longer a democracy, and Orbán is the architect of its transformation into an illiberal autocracy.

And yet, civil society friends in Hungary urge me to still have hope – because they do. In a country that has been in a one party chokehold, the opposition managed some breakthrough wins in recent elections, including in Budapest. Peter Kreko, one of the best analysts in Hungary told me the "election results sent a clear signal to the West – including Western governments and multinational companies – that there is politics beyond Orbán and Fidesz, and that this regime's rule will not last forever."

This is particularly impressive given the ruthlessness of Prime Minister Orbán's campaign to gain total control and punish those who disagree. Right before his reelection in 2018, Orbán ominously declared in a speech before tens of thousands of supporters that "after the elections we will take revenge — moral, political and legal revenge." This he has done. Soon after, pro-government magazine *Figyelo* published a blacklist with the names of 200 Orbán critics. Next came the passing of the "Stop Soros" law which has had a chilling effect on the ability of all NGOs to function in Hungary⁴. In 2017 the ruling Fidesz party had laid the groundwork with strict new rules for NGOs with foreign funding⁵ - even money received from the European Union is considered foreign. Almost all major institutions in Hungary now serve the interest of the ruling Fidesz party. What is incredible, is that much of the systematic dismantling of the rule of law, democratic institutions, and independent media has been done in the open, under a legal veneer and with a rewritten constitution.

³ Armin Rosen, Ewa Kurek Favorite Historian of the Polish Far-right," *Tablet Magazine*, May 3, 2018. <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/261051/ewa-kurek-favorite-historian-of-the-polish-far-right>).

⁴ Marton Dunai, "Hungary approves 'STOP Soros' law, defying EU, rights groups," *Reuters*, June 20, 2018 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-soros/hungary-approves-stop-soros-law-defying-eu-rights-groups-idUSKBN1JG1VN>

⁵ Krisztina Than and Marton Dunai, "Hungary Tightens Rules on Foreign-Funded NGOS, Defying EU," *Reuters*, June 13, 2017 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-hungary-ngo-law/hungary-tightens-rules-on-foreign-funded-ngos-defying-eu-idUKKBN19417T>

The government now directly or indirectly controls almost all of the media. In 2018 Reporters Without Borders declared that *"Fidesz has extended its sway over the entire regional press...This sounds the knell for media independence in Hungary."* Even though by 2018 Orbán had succeeded in gaining complete control over freedom of the press, primarily through of media ownership in the hands of 'his' oligarchs, he continued to innovate with new methods of media control. In November 2018, 400 media outlet owners "donated" their holdings) to a single foundation. Parliament then passed a law exempting this new media foundation from antitrust regulation or oversight.

Hungary is not Russia or Turkey – where journalists fear imprisonment, violence, or death. Orbán instead relied on one tired trick in particular, one that served as a dog whistle for the far right; he used the spectral image of George Soros, using anti-Semitic tropes, as the ultimate bogeyman to stir up fear of migrants and other non-Christians.

I'll conclude on Hungary with a recent example. Though Prime Minister Orbán has stated that the government has zero tolerance for anti-Semitism, he has used words and images that incite antisemitic and other racist sentiments. The government has targeted the NGO Aurora in particular; Aurora is a community center founded by the Jewish youth group Marom Budapest, which is focused on "social inclusion, building civil society and fighting for human rights." Aurora has been under constant attack by far-right attacks, police raids, and targeted application of laws. In the past month alone, extremist mobs have felt emboldened (likely by the signals sent by the government) to attack Aurora, including by burning a rainbow flag, branding a para-military logo, and other vandalism. The Hungarian government has tried to minimize these incidents with false 'facts' and false comparisons.

Hungary still has the trappings of a democracy – it has elections, with an opposition movement that is unifying, and an independent civil society that continues to operate, albeit in challenging circumstances.

Why this is a danger to NATO and American security

1. NATO States are letting Russia in the back door.

Prime Minister Orbán has brought Hungary closer to Russia and left an open door to malign Russian influence. Specifically, the Hungarian government gave diplomatic immunity to the Russian staff of the International Investment Bank (relocating from Moscow to Budapest), which is believed to be a front for Russian intelligence.

Turkey, under President Erdoğan, has scorned NATO's democratic values, and is a prime example of how a turn to authoritarianism also means an opening for Russia. In Turkey's case, the alliance is rightly panicked about the purchase of S-400s, the surface-to-air missile system, from Russia.

Leaders in both Turkey and Hungary have defiantly asserted that they don't have to choose between NATO and relationships with Russia – they say they can have their S-400s and still have the security of collective defense. That is not what being an ally means. Let us not forget, there is a geopolitical contest underway, which includes an assault on our democratic way of life. Russia is our adversary in that conflict.

2. Corruption and organized crime

Both Romania and Bulgaria fall short of EU rule of law requirements and are under a review process, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), intended to facilitate efforts to reform its judiciary and

the fight against corruption and organized crime.⁶ While in both countries the level of corruption remains a serious problem, Romania was harshly criticized by the European Commission in its October report on its shortcomings in judicial reform and the fight against corruption.⁷

There have been devastating reports of the extent of the corruption in Hungary under Orbán's leadership. Hungary has dropped 14 places since 2010 on Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, with particularly alarming scores on measures of judicial effectiveness and government integrity.⁸ (Note: Slovakia's performance on this index is also of concern.) Despite Orbán's anti-EU campaign, Hungary depends – more than any other EU state - heavily on the inflow of EU funds. It accounts for 80 percent of all public investment. *The New York Times* exposed recently the shocking extent of Orbán's corruption, particularly in the farming and health care sectors where he uses EU funds as a personal slush fund; e.g. "at least one of the private companies receiving health care contracts has diverted tax money to Mr. Orbán's own soccer team." I have heard from some Hungarians that the corruption in the hospital system is the most visible – people know that their local hospital is unfit for helping sick people - and is understandably creating the most outrage.

Where corruption is allowed to flourish and is orchestrated by the government, there is decline in citizen trust. A new **study** published by the German Economic Institute explained why Eastern Europeans' faith in EU-style democracy has declined in the past decade: "Democracy and corruption are complementary institutions," the report says, and "increased experiences of corruption in these states undermine the support for democracy."⁹ *A key lesson here, the transatlantic alliance needs to fight corruption if it is to restore citizen trust in democracy.*

3. Europe's Autocrats Look East, Signals Loss of US Influence

In the past year, there has been a curious deepening on the relationship between Hungary and China. This time last year, Orbán's regime was in the process of expelling Central European University (CEU), a joint American-Hungarian institution, with academic accreditation in Hungary and the State of New York. This was a direct refusal to honor American requests (from the administration and the state of New York) to keep CEU open in Hungary.

At around the same time, there was a new academic partnership being developed between Hungary and China. In March, there was an exuberant unveiling ceremony for a Chinese–language institute in Hungary, furthering an academic partnership with the Confucius Institute at University of Szeged (CIUS). A Hungarian representative said, Hungary, is "a bridge linking the East and the West, and "would play an increasingly important role in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁰ Perhaps it was coincidental that the Hungarian government was snubbing its academic partnership with America at the same time it was

⁶ European Union Progress reports: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/assistance-bulgaria-and-romania-under-cvm/reports-progress-bulgaria-and-romania_en

⁷ European Commission Press Release, "European Commission's report on developments in Romania under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism," October 22, 2019. https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-6135_en.htm

⁸ Heritage 2019 Index of Economic Freedom, <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/hungary>

⁹ Lucy Papachristou, "EU on Corruption," OCCRP, November 1, 2018. <https://www.occrp.org/en/27-ccwatch/cc-watch-briefs/8902-eu-on-corruption-romania-backtracks-bulgaria-progresses>

¹⁰ Tao Shengfei, Confucius Institute at University of Szeged (CIUS) Holds a Lecture on China-Hungary Relations & Unveiling Ceremony of BCT Test Center, *Hanban News*, March 12, 2019, http://english.hanban.org/article/2019-03/12/content_765860.htm

welcoming an enhanced Chinese partnership, but Hungary was also the first EU member to sign China's BRI.

With Czech President Miloš Zeman having a decidedly pro-China policy, the Czech Intelligence agency warned that "exposure of Czech citizens to China's espionage interest is extremely high and the intensity of Chinese intelligence activities in the Czech Republic is high as well."¹¹

An Outlier in NATO Can Stymie Solidarity

Hungary has repeatedly scuttled NATO's efforts to build a closer relationship with Ukraine. Moreover, Orbán, as well as Putin, have been reported to have influenced President Trump's view of Ukraine. It is an obvious point that Putin stands the most to gain from NATO not getting closer to or more supportive of Ukraine. During President Putin's October visit to Budapest, Hungary also hosted a Eurasian Forum, where Foreign Minister Szijjártó proudly announced that "Hungary has vetoed the joint statement of NATO ambassadors on Ukraine" justifying this move by claiming that "Hungary refuses to sacrifice the Transcarpathian Hungarian community on the altar of geopolitics"¹² Not surprisingly, the Kremlin seized on this narrative. The Hungarian government was using this as an opportunity to deliver a win to the Kremlin and advance Orbán's ethno-nationalist narrative; the final NATO text was passed with an addendum requested by Hungary and Ukraine vowed to respect minority rights. In regards to Ukraine's education law, which Hungary claimed as the reason for its obstruction, the **Venice Commission**,¹³ the appropriate body to consider the issue, had already issued recommendations.

To put a fine point on it, the closer relationship between Russia and Hungary – politically, economically, and in the energy sector – means that Russia has a proxy to influence NATO and that Orbán is willing to sacrifice actual security concerns for its Russian partner and for narrow ethnic political reasons.

Window of Opportunity

While liberal democracy is being challenged, it is not being challenged by an alternative model that provides better outcomes – Russia is no longer trying to convince people of its greatness. It is simply trying to sow disorder and chaos to tilt the playing board. Putin can't compete on the merits, so he is trying to change the narrative.

In his initial address to the nation as the first post-communist president of Czechoslovakia, it is appropriate to remember Václav Havel's words that captured the essence of why democracy is a participatory game, one with responsibilities for a broad array of stakeholders: "the best government in the world, the best parliament and the best president, cannot achieve much on their own. And it would be wrong to expect a general remedy from them alone. Freedom and democracy include participation and therefore responsibility from us all."¹³ The need then is to focus on our values, on having democracy work better for citizens, and to understand that alliances make us stronger.

¹¹ Agata Palickova, "China's political interference in Czech Republic back in focus," EurActiv, July 24, 2019 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-europe/news/chinas-political-interference-in-czech-republic-back-in-focus/>

¹² Political Capital analysis. October 30, 2019 https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2465

¹³ Václav Havel, "New Year's Address to the Nation," (speech, Prague, January 1, 1990), http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/havel-speech-1-1-90_0c7cd97e58.pdf.

Those of us who have worked in Russia and Europe policy in decided we needed to galvanize a bipartisan defense against Russia and in support of the transatlantic alliance. In 2018 we established the Transatlantic Democracy Working Group (TDWG) as a response to address democratic erosion and the lack of U.S. leadership to address it. This group of experts from across the political spectrum agreed to stand up together to fight for the defense of democracy, because we believe that American and European prosperity and our very security depend on it. The silver lining I have found in managing this coalition is that citizens woke up to the realization that democracy is not a passive project – if we want it to sustain our security, we must nurture and protect it.

With scholars at The Brookings Institution, Norm Eisen, Alina Polyakova, and Torrey Taussig I recently published the “Democracy Playbook.” We felt there was a vital need for such a playbook so that with our pro-democracy allies, we can help restore democratic resilience in countries where it is at risk. The idea of a democracy playbook came from discussions with pro-democracy actors in countries that are the most vulnerable to both national and foreign autocratic influence, and are on the frontlines of the fight to preserve democracy in Europe. One of the ways that we have already set in motion the democracy playbook project is through building relationships with emerging European leaders, who we believe are best positioned to operationalize the recommendations of our playbook.

The problems facing the alliance seem daunting, but all NATO countries still have democratic institutions and active civil societies, that provide avenues for responding. The ability of the political opposition and civil society to operate gives pro-democracy actors an urgent window of opportunity to push back on illiberal activity before it becomes further entrenched, and in turn, more difficult to undo.

Moving forward, democracy must be shown to work. Our Democracy Playbook¹⁴ (attached for reference) highlights strategies and tactics for pro-democracy actors to not only push back against illiberal and authoritarian-leaning actors, but also to renew the promise and resiliency of democratic institutions. While there will be no single, perfect strategy to best counter these illiberal challenges and rebuild trust in our alliance, we are dedicated to doing our part to equip democratic actors to defend and rebuild our democratic institutions, revitalize trust in democracy, and come together in common cause.

Before I conclude by sharing a few of our recommendations, I wanted to summarize five of the key points that should underpin a strategic approach to reinvigorating democracy as a security imperative for the alliance.

- Democracy is not a linear process, it can move forward and backward, and it requires active support at all levels.
- Democratic backsliding is a threat to shared security as it undermines alliance trust and interoperability
- Russia is an adversary to NATO, it seeks to bring chaos to the transatlantic system and destabilize democratic institutions.
- Corruption is weakening the alliance from within
- Technology has forever changed the operating environment for security and democracy

¹⁴ Norm Eisen, Andrew Kenealy, Susan Corke, Alina Polyakova, Torrey Taussig, *The Democracy Playbook, Brookings and TDWG Report*, November 2019.

What Else Should Be Done?

The far-reaching consequences of a decade-long run of authoritarian resurgence makes renewing and reenergizing liberal democracy in the trans-Atlantic space all the more necessary. To remain relevant, the transatlantic alliance and its leaders and institutions must be able to defend against and confront these current challenges.

1. **US Must Lead NATO in Reinforcing its Democratic Principles.** NATO as a military organization is not and should not be a leading actor in addressing democracy challenges, but member states have committed to “strengthening their free institutions”¹⁵ and should therefore stand by those principles whenever possible. Possible steps the U.S. could explore include:
 - a. Creating a commission or special ombudsman’s office within NATO that would be responsible for identifying violations of alliance principles.
 - b. At a minimum, NATO should continue to bolster its communiqué language regarding the importance of democracy to the strength of the alliance and should not hold summits or meetings in countries that have seen significant regression on rule of law.
2. **US needs to lead by asserting a linkage between democracy and security,** particularly by mobilizing the integrated capabilities of NATO in countering the aggression from Putin’s Russia.
 - a. Reaffirming economic sanctions on Russia will remain in place for as long as it occupies Ukrainian territory;
 - b. Sustaining NATO rotational troop deployments to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, while adding capacity
 - c. Reaffirming our commitment to democracy, as a system that has brought us peace. A go-it-alone world run by nationalist autocrats would be a scary place.
3. **Make defending democracy and rule of law a first order priority.**
 - a. The U.S. should support EU efforts to hold non-performing members accountable. The Eurobarometer showed that 89% of European support the need for the rule of law to be respected in all other EU Member States.¹⁶
 - b. U.S. officials should issue systematic, coordinated, and high-level responses to any attempts to roll back rule of law while avoiding the perception that activities are solely externally driven. This engagement should prioritize messages that the U.S. does not support democratic rollbacks, infringements on human rights, censoring of independent media, universities and NGOs, and the hindering of judicial independence and efficacy.
 - c. In more supportive environments, donors and governments should vocally promote laws that safeguard NGOs and activists to help create a conducive environment.
4. **Change a narrative that is no longer working– Democracy is not the end of history.** Democracy must be nurtured and we must be alert to warnings when a fragile democracy starts to stray, as with Hungary and Poland. The U.S. must assert that is a legitimate and integrated part of our bilateral and multilateral relationships.

¹⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “The North Atlantic Treaty,” *NATO*, April 4, 1949, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

¹⁶ European Commission, Initiative on Strengthening the Rule of Law, “https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/initiative-strengthen-rule-law-eu_en

5. **To support democracy, the U.S. needs an adapted funding model.** The graduation model of democracy assistance is no longer sufficient to address the challenges of democracies in regression and in transition to authoritarianism. Russia is investing heavily in the information space – it is working. Priorities flow from money, thus we must invest adequately, particularly in media and civil society by,
 - a. Enhancing support for civil society, both regional and country specific. More funding should be allocated to countries where checks and balances are under attack, and particularly to organizations operating outside of national capitals.
 - b. Increased funding for independent media, including for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to establish or reestablish bureaus in countries where the media environment has become less free and where citizens can benefit from better access to uncensored news, responsible discussion, and open debate.
 - c. Invest in people with exchange programs: good proposals for Congress to consider include a U.S.-Poland Parliamentary Exchange Program and one honoring the murder of former Gdansk mayor, Pawel Adamowicz.
 - d. Direct democracy support funding in countries at an earlier point – don't wait for a full-blown democratic crisis to invest in capacity building, skills-training, monitoring, and network-building. Seek to always advance local ownership and involvement.
6. **Go beyond capitals and understand local context:** a starting point for external support must be understanding the local context and expressed needs of local activists. This knowledge transfer should occur through frequent interactions with a range of civil society and other local actors.
7. **Advancing institutional channels.** The US must continue to be a strong leader, working with allies. While support from these institutions can only go so far (given weak enforcement mechanisms based on member government compliance), rulings and reports create recommendations and pressure to reform.
8. **Cyber-defense and technology preparedness:**
 - a. Support independent media organizations and CSOs working to expose disinformation.
 - b. Governments and political parties should invest in the people and systems necessary for the technological security of election counting, voter registration machines, and political campaign networks.
9. **Countering abuse and manipulation of social media platforms needs to be prioritized.**
 - a. Dedicate funding for digital media literacy programs.
 - b. Hold social media companies accountable for removing material that violates the law.
 - c. Support narrowly tailored targeted government regulations that do not infringe on users' right to free speech—focusing on mechanisms like political advertising and disinformation prevalence measures.
10. **China knowledge and preparedness:** The transatlantic alliance needs to better understand and prepare for what a rising China will mean for the transatlantic alliance.
11. **Finally, we need allies.** Non-engagement and going it alone does not work and will leave us weak and vulnerable. We have 70 years of peace with Europe to prove that this alliance is to the benefit of American security.