

## About Ambassador of Hungary to the U.S., Dr. László Szabo, Lecture at UVU



Dr. László Szabo, the Hungarian Ambassador to the United States, visited Utah Valley University on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to offer a lecture entitled “Hungary and the Geopolitical Importance of Central Europe: What’s in it for the United States?” This lecture offered a brief history of Hungary, detailed their contributions to the world up to this point, and outlined some domestic and international policies currently being implemented to bolster Hungary’s economy and worldwide presence.

Dr. Szabó was key in helping Prime Minister Viktor Orbán transition the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, utilizing his knowledge of the private sector to boost an originally struggling economy. Following the 2010 economic crisis around the world, Hungary was forced to take out a loan from the IMF, but was able to repay that loan earlier than scheduled due to the work and initiatives enforced under Dr. Szabó’s supervision.



Offering a short description of the formation of Hungary, Dr. Szabó set the stage for what events guided his nation to where it stands today. Hungary has been a Christian nation since the year 1000, when Szent István Király, the king of Hungary, adopted Christianity as the state religion. Hungary still values its Judeo-Christian heritage, and remains a Christian state. Other formative events in Hungary's history include multiple occupations by foreign powers, such as the Ottomans, the Habsburgs, and of course, the Soviet Union under the Warsaw Pact. These forces, as described by Dr. Szabó, show the resiliency of the Hungarian spirit and have created a nation that is exceptionally patriotic in nature.

Following his brief history lesson, Dr. Szabó then talked about Hungary's impact on the world at large, mostly by reviewing cultural and technical innovations developed by Hungarians or those of Hungarian descent. These include the ballpoint pen, soda water, and the large influence Hungarians have had on the film industry. This then led him to discussing the modern innovations that are going on in Hungary, addressing the subtitle of his lecture, what the geopolitical importance of Central Europe means for the United States.

Hungary and the United States are closely working together on one of Dr. Szabó's pet projects, the BPDC, or the Business Promotion and Development Campus, centered on bringing

small businesses and tech startups from Hungary to the US. The groundbreaking for this facility was held on November the 15th. The project aims to continue Hungarian innovation so that it may spread the world over.

While the main goal of his lecture was to educate Utah Valley University students and staff about Hungary and its current economic goals in conjunction with the United States, the Ambassador then opened the floor to questions from the audience. A few things that he spoke about included perceived leanings from the media towards Russia, rather than towards the European Union. Dr. Szabó refuted these claims, citing that Hungarians owed no special love to a country that occupied them for almost 50 years, and that they stood tall in condemning Russia for their supposed hand in the Salisbury poisoning. He then pointed to Hungary's great alliance with more westward powers, such as Hungary being a member of NATO since 1999.

On a more personal note, I had the opportunity to speak with the Ambassador for around 10 minutes before the start of his presentation. I have strong ties to Hungary; my great grandfather fled Hungary before the start of World War Two, and I had the opportunity to live in Hungary for a period of two years while also learning the language. While speaking to the Ambassador we talked about his hometown, Debrecen, where I also lived, and of Hungary's commitment to keep their youth inside their borders. While illegal immigration into Hungary is a hot button issue, one of more importance is to keep a young, educated workforce at hand in a nation that has a median age of 41.8 years. He talked specifically about their university education that draws students from around the world, and especially of the tax incentives offered to tech startups. This issue is one of dire importance to Hungary's future welfare, and Dr. Szabó says that it is a main priority going forward in their economic plans.

The Ambassador's visit to UVU was informative and positive. His lecture was aimed to change the assumed opinions that Hungary is just another Eastern European state clinging to what power it held under the Warsaw Pact. Instead, he presented his country as one that is looking towards the future, turning westward, and aiming to become an economic and political powerhouse in not just Central Europe, but the world.

**Zachary Smith, UVU Student**