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Dear Mr. Commissioner:

Congratulations on the historic enlargement of the European Union, a process the United States has supported steadfastly over many years. I know that you have been instrumental in preparing for this truly momentous step, and it must bring you great satisfaction to see it come to such a successful conclusion.

The United States, of course, looks forward to further close consultation and collaboration with the EU on issues of mutual interest as the process of enlargement continues. In this spirit, Secretary Powell has asked me to write to you on just such an issue, reform of Romanian child welfare and adoption laws. The current, and we believe deeply flawed, draft law could receive final review in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies as early as next week. The Romanian government tells us the draft law was put forward at the behest of Baroness Emma Nicholson, the European Parliament's Special Rapporteur on Romanian EU Accession.

Child welfare in Romania is in a dire state, and the United States and the EU each have sought to effect positive change. Forty-five thousand children remain in group homes and institutions, and not on a short-term basis. More children have been abandoned, and continue to be abandoned, than there are Romanian families willing to adopt them. Ending inter-country adoptions and making domestic adoption more difficult does nothing to help them. Our government fully subscribes to the spirit of the Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption, which states a clear preference for placing abandoned or orphaned children in permanent family homes over foster or institutional care.

Reform of the child welfare system in Romania, including the resumption of inter-country adoptions, is a serious concern for both the administration and our Congress. We have joined the EU in pressing for a new law that would eliminate the shortcomings and the potential for corruption that the old law allowed. We

His Excellency
Günter Verheugen,
Commissioner for Enlargement,
European Commission,
Brussels.

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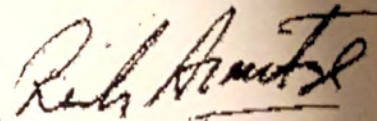
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want the new law to be applied strictly, and we have pledged to join in helping to create the bodies needed to implement it.

I ask you to clarify to Prime Minister Nastase that the EU is not insisting on the ban that the Prime Minister believes is being undertaken at your request, and to underscore your support for ensuring the best interests of Romania's children, in line with Romania's Hague Convention commitments.

A united front from the EU and the United States will help hasten the reform process in Romania. It also will lead to a much improved legal basis for addressing the needs of Romania's many institutionalized children. We want to be your partner in this effort and are looking forward to consultations with you.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Armitage