



Friends of Slovakia NEWSLETTER

Volume 12, Issue 1 • Summer 2011

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PEACE CORPS AND SLOVAKIA: PARTNERS IN TRANSFORMATION

A remarkable celebration of the work of the Peace Corps in Slovakia, Slovakia's democratic transition and the role of volunteerism in building civil society took place May 23 at Peace Corps Headquarters. Friends of Slovakia, the Slovak Embassy and the Peace Corps sponsored two afternoon panel discussions and a festive evening reception at the Slovak Embassy. Attendees at both events included members of Friends of Slovakia, the diplomatic corps and former Peace Corps volunteers and staff who served in Slovakia. The panel discussions were moderated by Peace Corps Deputy Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet. Over 320 PCVs served in Slovakia from 1990-2002.



Amb. Peter Burian, Amb. Ted Russell, Bill Tucker, Alice Gingold, Joe Senko, Julie Slavik, Gary Glasgall (Ms. Gingold's nephew)

The principal theme of the first panel was Slovakia's progress from a recipient of assistance in building a civil society to a donor of assistance to other countries, with an emphasis on the role of volunteerism in fostering democracy and human rights. The Slovak government and Slovak NGOs have been active in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Afghanistan and beyond supporting democratization and civil society.



Mike Hochleutner, Lenka Surotchak, Igor Naumovski



Tomicah Tilleman, Filip Vagac, Roger Potocki, Wendy Luers, Carrie Hessler-Radelet

Distinguished panelists included Dr. Tomicah Tilleman, Secretary Clinton's Senior Advisor for Civil Society and Emerging Democracies, Filip Vagac, the Slovak Government's Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society, Roger Potocki, Director for Europe and Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy and FOS Board of Advisor's member Wendy Luers, Founder and President of the Foundation for a Civil Society. U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Tod Sedgwick and FOS Founding Chairman Ted Russell served as discussants.

Dr. Tilleman described Secretary Clinton's strong support for US policy initiatives to support civil society and democratic transformation internationally.

Filip Vagac gave examples of Slovakia's role in supporting democratization in other countries and mentioned his recent visits to Egypt to support their democratic transition. While there are many differences between Central Europe and countries of the Middle East, Mr. Vagac said that Egyptian partners welcomed information on how Slovakia strengthened its civil society.

Roger Potocki emphasized the importance of getting young people involved in voter mobilization efforts. He explained that Slovakia's "success story", because it involved overcoming an initially difficult democratic transition, is a powerful example for Eastern European and other countries to follow. He praised the effectiveness of "transnational networks" of NGO volunteers, including Slovaks, with experience in building civil society.

Wendy Luers described the impressive work of the Foundation for a Civil Society in supporting Czechoslovak and then Slovak democratization during the difficult early years. She emphasized the importance of establishing trust with those seeking democratic reform, the need to focus on the younger generation and the importance of encouraging volunteers to take the initiative and "just do it" even at the risk of occasional failure. She cited the role of her foundation in the dramatically successful 1998 "Rock the Vote" educational effort in which second panel speakers, Lenka Surotchak and Mike Hochleutner, were heavily involved.

Corps volunteer **Mike Hochleutner** described his work in helping bring "Rock the Vote" youth voter mobilization techniques to Slovakia. These successfully increased youth voter participation in the 1998 Slovak national elections which paved the way for Slovakia's admission to the EU and NATO in 2004. **Lenka Surotchak**, currently Pontis Foundation Director in Slovakia and previously associated with the Foundation for a Civil Society, was a Slovak counterpart with Mr. Hochleutner on the "Rock the Vote" initiative. She discussed her successful efforts in supporting a variety of Slovak NGOs as well as Pontis Foundation's work in Cuba and elsewhere. PCV **Igor Naumovski**, who worked with a Roma community, discussed the difficulties faced by economically and socially disadvantaged groups and the importance of "buy in" by community leaders. **Julius Kassovic**, a former Peace Corps program manager in Slovakia, was the panel's discussant.

A well attended evening reception hosted by Ambassador Burian at the Slovak Embassy allowed interaction of guests with former Peace Corps volunteers. Friends of Slovakia presented its Medal of Honor to **Alice Gingold**, who closed her successful commercial real estate firm and joined the Peace Corps at age 71. She served in Zvolen in 1995-96. Ms. Gingold was honored for her extraordinary achievements and spirit of initiative during and after her Peace Corps assignment. She was the driving force in the loving restoration of the destroyed Jewish cemetery which also contained a mass grave of local victims of the Slovak National Uprising. Ms. Gingold, who lost many family members in the Holocaust, repeatedly returned to Zvolen after leaving the Peace Corps to see the project through. She then helped spark the creation of an adjacent "Park of Generous Souls" honoring Holocaust victims and those who tried to assist them. The park, created by national artists with Slovak government funding, was dedicated by Prime Minister Fico in 2009. Ms. Gingold responded to her award with a moving tribute to the Peace Corps and the people of Slovakia. ♦

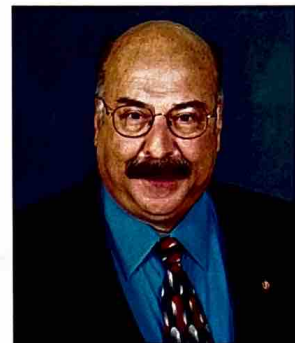
HONORARY CONSUL AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL ROSS MARINE

Ross P. Marine has served as Honorary Consul of the Slovak Republic in the Midwestern Region since 2001. The Midwest Region includes Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma. He and his wife, Barbara, reside in Kansas City, Missouri as do their two adult children and three grandchildren.

In his role as honorary consul, Mr. Marine has promoted and encouraged business, cultural, educational and international exchange between the Midwest and Slovakia. He participated in the Chamber of Commerce 2008 trade mission to Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria.

In 2009 Consul Marine, in collaboration with the Czech honorary consul and the Czech & Slovak Club of Kansas City, hosted a three-day celebration in Kansas City of the 1989 Velvet Revolution attended by Slovak Ambassador Peter Burian and the Czech Embassy's deputy chief of mission.

In 2011 Ross, the Czech honorary consul and the Czech & Slovak Club will host an exhibit of the Biennial of Slovak Illustrations Bratislava (1967-2009) and Czech art at a Kansas City art gallery. As his schedule allows, he represents the Slovak Republic at civic, cultural and academic events in the Midwest.



Ross P. Marine

Mr. Marine has over 40 years of broad-based experience and background in acute and long term care, public health, and healthcare delivery systems. From 1994 to 1998 he served as project coordinator for the American International Health Alliance and the U.S. Agency for International Development in the planning and development of a "Healthy Communities Project" in Bratislava, with a focus on the Petralka district. For the past 10 years he has been president of The Murino Group Healthcare and Management Consultants, Kansas City, Missouri.

Ross is active in community, civic and governmental organizations and has served as a current board member/officer of various non-profit businesses, commissions and associations. Through his diplomatic work he is a member of the Consular Corps of Greater Kansas City and a board member of the Czech & Slovak Club of Greater Kansas City.

His academic achievements include a master's degree in hospital administration from the University of Minnesota and a bachelor's degree in health services administration from the University of Kings College, Toronto. In 1996 Mr. Marine was the recipient of the prestigious University of Minnesota Alumni Association's Gaylord W. Anderson Leadership Award for outstanding public health alumni. ♦

WILLIAM TUCKER RECEIVES DUTCH ROYAL DECORATION

At the May 6 Netherland-America Foundation Awards dinner in Washington, D.C. William Tucker, Vice Chairman and President of Friends of Slovakia, was presented with the Order of Orange-Nassau, with the rank of Officer (a level above Knight) by the Dutch Ambassador, Her Excellency Renee Jones-Bos as the representative of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands,



Rhonda Wilkins, Amb. C. Howard Wilkins, Nancy Tucker, Bill Tucker

The Order of Orange-Nassau is a military and civil order of the Netherlands which was created on 4 April 1892 by the Queen Regent Emma of the Netherlands acting on behalf of her under age daughter, Queen Wilhelmina. It is presented to those individuals "who have earned special merits for society". These are people who deserve appreciation and recognition from society for the special way in which they have carried out their activities. The order is comparable with the Order of the British Empire in the UK.

Mr. Tucker serves on the Board of Directors of the Netherland-America Foundation (NAF); started and chaired an annual fundraising dinner in Washington, DC; and assisted in obtaining a Congressional Resolution and a Presidential Proclamation establishing Dutch-American Heritage Day.

Some of the proceeds from the NAF's annual fundraising dinner go towards scholarships for Dutch students to study in the US and US students to study in the Netherlands. The dinner has generally raised over \$100,000. ♦

FOS HOSTS LUNCH FOR SLOVAK STATE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

On March 31, Friends of Slovakia hosted a luncheon at the Washington Golf & Country Club for Robert Ondrejcsak, the Slovak State Secretary for Defense, who was visiting Washington, DC for meetings at the Pentagon. State Secretary Ondrejcsak was accompanied on his visit by Jaroslav Nad, the General Director of Defense Policy and International Affairs, Chief of Staff Vladimir Tarasovic and Lt. Col. Christopher Burelli, Air Attache, US Embassy Bratislava.

The luncheon was attended by a number of defense company executives, including Ms. Caroline Sevier from BAE Systems, Joe Ghesquiere from Lockheed Martin and Jean-Paul George from Raytheon.

Slovak Ambassador Peter Burian, Ambassador Theodore Russell, Founding Chairman of Friends of Slovakia (FOS), Joe Senko, Chairman and Bill Tucker, Vice Chairman and President, attended the luncheon on behalf of the FOS Board of Directors.



Joe Senko and Robert Ondrejcsak at lunch

State Secretary Ondrejcsak gave a briefing on the state of the Slovak military and US-Slovak military cooperation and answered questions from the luncheon attendees. The intimate luncheon provided FOS and the other guests a good opportunity to learn about the status of the Slovak military and future development plans. ♦

FOS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM SUPPORTS SUMMER STUDY PROGRAM

Friends of Slovakia welcomes three Slovak Scholars who are studying at Washington, DC's Georgetown University this summer. On June 15, they were honored at a garden reception hosted by Juraj and Julie Slavik. Attending were representatives of The Fund for American Studies, the Slovak -American Foundation, the Slovak Embassy staff and FOS board members.

Bohdana Jakoncukova (from Humenne) is studying at the Engalitcheff Institute on Comparative Political and Economic Systems (ICPES). She studied International Economic Relations at the University of Economics in Bratislava. Bohdana has worked at the American Chamber of Commerce and the Euroatlantic Center. She currently has an internship at IHS Global Insight thanks to FOS Board member Sharon Fisher.

Veronika Korcekova (from Zvolen) is studying at the Institute on Philanthropy and Voluntary Service (IPVS). She has a Master's degree in International Development Studies from Palacky University in Olomouc, Czech Republic. In addition to her studies in the Czech Republic, Veronika has also studied abroad in Austria. She has interned at Euromontana in Brussels, Belgium and at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Bratislava. She currently has an internship with Samaritan Ministries in Washington, DC. Veronika's brother was also a Slovak Scholar.



Juraj Slavik, Mary McPherson, Joe Senko, Julie Slavik, Veronika Korcekova, Pavol Gavor, Amb. Ted Russell, Bohdana Jakoncukova

Pavol Gavor (from Poprad) is studying at the Institute on Business and Government Affairs (IBGA). He has his Master's degree in Political Science from Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica. Pavol has already participated in study abroad programs in Belgium and Poland, and he has interned at the Slovak Foreign Ministry and the Educational Initiative for Central and Eastern Europe in Vienna, Austria. Pavol is a founding member of the Africa Centre of Slovakia. He currently has an internship at US Steel thanks to FOS Board member Scott Salmon. ♦

NATIONAL CZECH AND SLOVAK MUSEUM AND LIBRARY HISTORY AND CULTURE CONFERENCE: The 20th Century in Retrospect - MARCH 2011



Amid myriad plans to move its museum building across the street, the staff of the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library (NCSML) organized its sixth and final conference in the series “The 20th Century in Retrospect.” This historically and intellectually rich series attracted blue ribbon speakers from both the United States and the Czech and Slovak Republics. The series provided a rich portrait of how, following World War I, the new nation of Czechoslovakia came into being and became a model of a democratic society; how it fell on very hard times following the Munich Agreement, with the Nazi occupation of the Czech lands during World War II, and the formation of a separate Slovak government which allied itself with many policies of the Third Reich. The post-war years saw the reunification of the country and the establishment of a communist government that lasted until 1989.

The 2011 Conference: 1989 – 2011: Transitions to Democracy concentrated on the events leading up to the Velvet Revolution and the Velvet Divorce in 1992. Topics included Michal Kukral’s first-hand recollection of the electrifying events in Prague in November 1989, and three presentations on Czechoslovakia 1989-1992; Slovakia 1993-2011 and the Czech Republic 1993-2011. Two Slovak diplomats, Peter Burian, current Slovak Ambassador to the United States, and Martin Bútora, former Slovak Ambassador to the US; and Jiri Erlinger, representing the Czech Embassy spoke on “Transitions to Democracy,” as they affected both republics. Zora Bútorová, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava gave a presentation on the status of Women’s Rights and Carol Skalnik Leff, Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign spoke about the Hungarian Minority in Slovakia. A final panel covered three main areas of infrastructure rebuilding: Reinvention of Security Intelligence Services After 1989; Post-Communism Education Reforms, and On The EU/NATO featuring Pavel Černoč (Press Officer, the European Union, Brussels), Martin Butora, and Jiri Erlinger.

Another feature of the conference was a presentation by Rosie Johnston on the Oral History Project of NCSML. These multi-hour, video-taped interviews capture personal histories of Slovak and Czech immigrants to the United States. They may be viewed on the NCSML website.

Closing the conference, the 100+ participants heard Ambassador Adrian Basora speak on “The Velvet Revolution – Twenty-Two Years Later: Has it Lived up to Its Original Promise?” Adrian Basora was the U.S. Ambassador to Prague from 1992-1995, and currently is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institutes and Director of the Project on Democratic Transition. He also serves on the Friends of Slovakia Advisory Board. Excerpts from his remarks follow.

“The Velvet Revolution Twenty-Two Years Later”

Recalling the early 1990s:

By the time we left Prague in 1995, most of our Czech friends were far more relaxed and confident about the future. By then, the post-communist transition in the Czech Republic seemed well on its way to success, as it was in Poland, Hungary and several other countries of Central Europe.

Unfortunately, however, Slovakia was visibly falling behind at that point, with Vladimir Mečiar trying to take the country back towards authoritarianism and cronyism, leading to economic stagnation. So in 1998 we were very pleased to see the Slovak electorate replace the Mečiar government with a strongly reformist coalition, and to see Slovakia rapidly catch up and, within just a few years, again take its place among the region’s democratic and economic front-runners.

The stories of Slovakia and the Czech Republic were paralleled by dramatic progress during the 1990’s in most of Eastern Europe, in the Baltic countries, and several of the other post-Soviet republics. *By the early 2000’s, democracy seemed clearly to be the wave of the future for all of Eastern Europe and for at least large parts of Eurasia.*

Now, just a decade later, both Slovakia and the Czech Republic do indeed have well-consolidated democracies and thriving market economies, as do numerous other Eastern European countries.

(continued on page 7)

PROFILE: WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SLOVAK CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

(This article is one of an occasional series profiling important Slovak-American fraternal and other organizations.)

The Western Pennsylvania Slovak Cultural Association (WPSCA) is a non-profit organization that brings together a number of Slovak fraternal society branches and other groups to provide a rich array of programs to serve the large Slovak-American community in the greater Pittsburgh area. WPSCA is also an organizational member and an active and strong supporter of the Friends of Slovakia.



Presov Mayor Pavel Hagyani and wife Jana with WPSCA board members

Data from the 2000 U.S. Census indicate that almost 800,000 people living in the U.S. self-identified themselves as being of Slovak heritage. Pittsburgh, a magnet for immigration during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is still recognized as the city having the most people of Slovak heritage outside the country of Slovakia itself. With this substantial concentration of Slovak-Americans, it was clearly desirable that the Slovak Foreign Ministry select Pittsburgh as one of the first areas in which to establish an honorary consulate in 1997. The ministry chose Joseph Senko as honorary consul.

With the Slovak Embassy seeking to enhance the profile of Slovakia in the U.S., Mr. Senko recognized the need to bring Slovak-Americans together and keep alive the strong sense of identity that supported Slovakia throughout the 20th century. The Pittsburgh area had a number of Slovak-related organizations, particularly branches of the major fraternal societies that offered activities and cultural programs, such as folk entertainment, to the Slovak-American community. This network of organizations was sometimes fragmented, however, with small organizations offering activities to a limited audience. To counter this, Senko spearheaded the formation of WPSCA, which brings together many of the local organizations under one umbrella, thus tapping into a wider audience and the ideas and talents of a more unified community.

WPSCA strives to offer an array of historical and cultural programs showcasing the richness of Slovak culture to a wider audience of Slovak-Americans, as well as the general public. WPSCA has sponsored over 100 cultural programs since its inception including Slovak language classes, films, cooking demonstrations, lectures, folk and other performances, photography and art exhibits, and scholarships. It also hosts visits by Slovak government officials, coordinates activities with its sister city Presov, sends English-language books to Slovak and Roma students, and actively participates in annual events such as the University of Pittsburgh Slovak festival and the Slovak Day at Kennywood Amusement Park in Pittsburgh.

In addition to Mr. Senko, who serves as Executive Director, WPSCA operates under a board of directors, with officers Clifford Moeller--President, Carolyn Potanko--Vice-president, Linda Strom--Secretary, and Albina Senko--Treasurer. FOS congratulates WPSCA on its success and values its active support as an organizational member in cultivating the continuing friendship between the U.S. and Slovakia. ♦

Friends of Slovakia wishes to thank its corporate sponsors for their continued support:

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Museum (continued from page 5)**Seen from the perspective of 2011:**

Very importantly, they are fully integrated into NATO and the European Union and into other Western institutions. *The possibility of a reversion to authoritarianism seems very remote.*

I should make it very clear, however, that not all of the high hopes of the Czechs and Slovaks that we heard in the early 1990s have been fully realized. These democracies are young and imperfect, with politicians not always up to the task, continuing corruption and bureaucracies that are not always responsive.

In fact, one of the clearest lessons learned from my own study of the post-communist transitions is that the move from harsh dictatorship and a highly centralized economy to a prosperous democracy takes a very long time. Even in the best of cases, 20 years is not quite enough, and it is important that reform efforts continue.

Nevertheless, if one compares the Slovak and Czech situations either with their own past – or even with many long-established Western democracies – they are doing very well indeed. As friends of the Czech and Slovak Republics, we should all take great pride in the example they have set for the rest of Eastern Europe, and for the world.

How Slovakia and the Czech Republic compare to rest of the post-communist region:

If you look to the immediate north and south, the Czechs and Slovaks enjoy some very positive company, both in the Baltics and in much of South Central Europe.

Using data from Freedom House, which studies all 29 post-communist countries annually in serious depth, we can count *eight solid democratic "success stories."* In addition to Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia have all now achieved solid democracies, with genuine alternation of power over several fully free elections. These countries have also shown a remarkable ability to survive politically and to prosper economically despite the world's worst recession since the 1930's.

And, moving further south, I see an additional *seven emerging democracies:* Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania. While most are still struggling with corruption and weak governance, and their success is by no means assured in the short term, they are slowly moving towards fuller democracy. And, very importantly, both the EU and NATO are firmly committed to helping them succeed. In effect, they are already inside a protective "cocoon" from which they will emerge sooner or later as confirmed democracies and full members of the Western club.

Unfortunately, the picture changes dramatically when one looks at the rest of the post-communist region. The countries that I have mentioned as budding success stories represent only 30% of the population and 6% of the landmass of the ex-Soviet empire.

In most of the former Soviet republics to the East, with 70% of the region's population, democracy is now on the defensive – most importantly in Russia and Ukraine. *This vast post-Soviet area is in fact now significantly less democratic, less secure, and less aligned with the West than it was 5 or even 10 years ago.* It is very important for Brussels and Washington to continue working hard to encourage and assist the 15 new democracies to continue their reforms to the point where they can serve as a powerful beacon for countries like Ukraine, Moldova and other transitional countries to the East.

I think that democracy and integration into the West remains a secure and consolidated achievement, not only for the Czech and Slovak Republics, but also for the other Visegrad countries (Poland and Hungary), for the Baltics, and for the other post-communist members of NATO.

In closing, I will end on an optimistic note. A solid majority of the Eastern European countries – in contrast with most of the former Soviet republics – have made great advances towards democracy since 1989. Even in the less democratic parts of the post-communist region, as I have mentioned, there is reason for hope in the longer term that these countries' earlier achievements will ultimately be parlayed into representative and accountable government. I believe that the U.S. can and should persist in supporting democracy in this vital region, albeit with a re-invigorated strategy and in close cooperation with our European allies. If we continue to build on the 40 years of investment that led to a successful end of the Cold War, and on the strong democratization momentum that we helped to build in Eastern Europe during the 1990's, *then in the long run we are laying the groundwork for success in the former Soviet republics and elsewhere.* ♦