



Friends of Slovakia NEWSLETTER

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Panel Updates Staffers on Pending Visa Legislation



Paul Wyganowski, Janusz Bugajski and Paul Rosenzweig participate in the visa symposium.

Friends of Slovakia in conjunction with American Friends of the Czech Republic and CSIS sponsored a successful Forum for Congressional staff March 5 on “The Impact of the New Visa Waiver Legislation on Central Europe.” The panel included Paul Rosenzweig, Acting Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, Department of Homeland Security, Mark Pekala, Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State and Michael Wyganowski, Executive Director, Center for European Policy Analysis. Janusz Bugajski, Director of the CSIS New European Democracies Project moderated the panel. The Forum was attended by a dozen Congressional staffers plus representatives from the Slovak (Amb. Kacer), Czech, Hungarian and Polish Embassies. AFoCR President Mike Rokos. FOS Vice Chairman Bill Tucker and FOS Founding Chairman Ted Russell also attended the Forum representing the sponsoring organizations.

The panelists discussed the status of proposed modernization and enlargement of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) now the subject of legislation recently introduced in the Senate (S-4 and the original Sen. Voinovich bill). They also commented on the impact of expanding the VWP with particular reference to inclusion of US allies in Central Europe and pointed out the negative foreign policy

Continued from page 1

implications of failure to do so.

Principal points made during the presentations and Q&A period were:

- * VWP enhancement and expansion is designed to improve US security, improve relations with new members and have a positive economic impact.
- * The existing VWP including 27 countries, predominately in Europe, is outdated. It must be modernized to apply uniform, security-enhancing standards to all countries worldwide who seek inclusion in the program. The goal is to assess individual travelers from member countries in ways that will enhance US security and the security of all travelers to the US.
- * In the interests of reciprocity, the VWP will not demand security standards from other countries that the US will not meet.
- * Enhanced security standards include:
 - ❖ Better reporting on lost passports
 - ❖ Better data on travelers, including criminal background
 - ❖ Development of an electronic travel authorization form for those not requiring visas
 - ❖ Securing agreement from countries to take back "overstay" cases - a problem with certain countries (not Visegrad group)
 - ❖ Increased airport security and use of air marshals
 - ❖ Improved document standards
- * State and DHS support VWP as a positive program and seek to keep it and strengthen it. Half of the

approximately 16 million tourists and business visitors to the US in 2006 came in under the VWP.

- * All future and current members of the VWP must apply the new, enhanced standards. Current members realize this and appreciate the utility of membership in the VWP.
- * US relations with the countries of Central Europe liberated from Communism and now on a democratic path have been based on respect, gratitude and good will. The CE countries have therefore supported US policies, including our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, US assistance is no longer provided or needed and CE participation in Iraq has brought them problems rather than benefits. As one panelist put it, the US-CE relationship has lost its overarching *raison d'être*.
- * Central European citizens see West European countries that have not supported US policies as strongly as they have in the VWP, while they have difficulty traveling to the US. This has caused considerable resentment. With travel and study opportunities for Central Europeans now open within the EU and travel to the US problematic, the urge of Central Europeans to visit the US is declining.
- * Opening the VWP to the countries of Central Europe will improve relations, even if it will not dramatically alter the current public view of the US.
- * The President is strongly committed to strengthening and expanding the VWP. If legislation is passed in timely fashion, USG panelists considered it feasible for qualified new members to enter the program before the end of the current Presidential term of office.
- * The new VWP legislation, which currently calls for a 10% refusal rate cap



Paul Rosenzweig presents the Dept. of Homeland Security position while Mark Pekala listens.

(Sen. Feinstein amendment) and requires DHS to put in place a system for tracking visitors leaving the US by air & sea exit points, has passed the Senate (S.4) and will now require a conference involving VWP legislation which has emerged from the House.

- * Current non-immigrant visa refusal rates: Czech Republic 9.4%; Hungary 12.7%; Slovakia 16%; Poland 26.2%

The Forum was judged a success by panelists and Congressional staffers. The staffers attending appeared to appreciate that the Forum was directed specifically at them. They asked good questions and appeared supportive of the VWP effort.

Those FOS members interested in the passage of legislation designed to enhance and expand the Visa Waiver Program to bring in our allies in Central Europe including Slovakia are encouraged to communicate with their elected representatives to urge their support. ♦

Enjoy Puppets at the Czech-Slovak Museum

The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library is mounting an original exhibition, *Puppetry! Suspended Imagination*, which features a spectacular collection of Czechoslovak antique puppets. It will run through Sept. 29, 2007 at the museum in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

This original exhibit captures the magic of the timeless art form of puppetry. From traveling troupes to professional theaters,



The Minnesota Sokol loaned these giant puppets.

the history of puppetry is found in the Czech and Slovak lands. From the late 18th through 19th centuries, puppetry was the only form of theater that traveled and performed in small villages. Puppetry perpetuated the Czech language and folk traditions, helped give rise to national awareness, and sometimes was even used to mock government authorities. These early traditions gave rise to puppetry as a legitimate professional art form in the Czech and Slovak lands today.

Over 100 antique and contemporary marionettes and hand puppets, graphics, and scenery will tell the tale of this long tradition. One unusual item is a set of historic puppets that were found sealed in a church wall in New York City. Visitors will especially like the replica theater wagon. In July a master puppet carver will do a hands-on workshop for puppet carvers.

For more information visit the museum's website: www.ncsml.org. ♦



The classic Czechoslovak puppet, Kasperek.

Peter Muzila Joins FOS Board



Peter Muzila, Board of Directors.

Friends of Slovakia is happy to welcome Peter Muzila to its Board of Directors. Peter is Honorary Consul of the Slovak Republic for the six states of

New England. He has already been serving FOS for several years as master of our website, a service that is greatly appreciated.

Peter received his education in Bratislava and Vienna, obtaining a Master of Engineering in Information Systems from the Slovak Technical University. He did further studies in business information systems, management and marketing at the Economics University in Bratislava and at two Austrian universities, including the University of Vienna.

Shortly after he finished university studies in 1994 he co-founded Allaire Corp., a high tech company in Newton, MA. He was the chief architect for the e-commerce division, and in that capacity he did the strategic planning and led teams through four major product releases. Allaire, a publicly traded company with 700+ employees and annual revenues of

\$130 million, merged with Macromedia, Inc. in 2001, and Peter stayed there one more year. At the present time, he functions as a private investor, conducting research and analysis of seed investment opportunities in the high tech field, and then funding promising firms.

He is a member of the Board of Advisors of the Czech and Slovak Association in Boston. He also serves on the council of the Museum of Fine Arts and as an Inner Circle Member of Bank of America's Celebrity Series, both in Boston. He has a strong interest in Slovak art and is acquainted personally with a number of Slovak painters and photographers. He organized an art exhibit at Harvard University.

Peter moved to the U.S. in 1994 but his parents still live in Nitra. He and his wife, Alyson, are busy raising their two sons, Lukas, 6, and Alexander, 2. But he does make time for his two favorite sports: tennis and golf. ♦

Lunch Honors Ľubomír Jahnátek, Slovak Minister of Economy

On Wednesday, April 4 the Slovak Embassy, Friends of Slovakia (FOS) and the International Business Government Councilors co-sponsored a luncheon at the Slovak Embassy in honor of visiting Minister of Economy, Mr. Ľubomír Jahnátek. Slovak Ambassador Rastislav Kacer opened the proceedings and officials from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Trade Representative's office made some comments after Minister Jahnátek spoke. The U.S. officials praised the economic reforms that Slovakia has made and the resulting growth in the economy. In addition, they remarked upon the strong ties between the U.S. and Slovakia.

The luncheon was attended by approximately 70 people, including corporate executives, U.S. government officials and members of the Board of Directors (Scott Salmon, U.S. Steel; John Miller, Raytheon; Sharon Fisher and Kenneth Bombara) and Board of Advisors (Juraj Slavik) of Friends of Slovakia. Bill Tucker, Vice Chairman of FOS,



Close-up of Wall of Honor—your name too can appear on this wall.

welcomed Minister Jahnátek to Washington, DC and presented him with a Friends of Slovakia lapel pin. Minister Jahnátek also viewed the FOS

Wall of Honor on the grounds of the Slovak Embassy and remarked favorably on the number of companies and names already on the Wall of Honor. ♦

FOS Film Series Continues in Washington

In an effort to help promote Slovak culture in the United States, Friends of Slovakia (FOS) has continued its film series in Washington, DC during 2007. The film events, which are held in cooperation with the Slovak Embassy, offer local residents an opportunity to view Slovak movies that are not otherwise available to the U.S. market. Attendance at the film series is free of charge, with an optional \$5 donation to FOS.

In January, FOS screened Juraj Jakubisko's 1985 film, *Perinbaba* [The Feather Fairy]. In this version of an old fairy tale, Perinbaba watches over the seasons and creates snow. One day, she adopts the fearless young Jakub as her assistant. But Jakub soon falls for Elizabeth, who is being persecuted by an

evil stepmother and two sisters back on earth. Jakub becomes mortal and returns to earth in an effort to save Elizabeth; however, he is stalked by Death, who emerges in the form of an old hag. It is up to Perinbaba to save Jakub and help him complete his mission. The film deals with mankind's longing for happiness, understanding, and love, as well as the attempt to overcome difficulties and triumph over death.

Another Jakubisko film was shown in March, this time his 1983 masterpiece, *Tisícročná včela* [The Thousand Year Old Bee]. A family saga that spans a 30-year period from the late 19th century through the World War I, *Tisícročná včela* begins by focusing on Martin, a

beekeeper and bricklayer who lives in a small Slovak village. The latter part shifts to Martin's son, Samo, who becomes political active at a time of rising social tensions, leading up to World War I. The film depicts the family members as they travel in search of work, experience happiness and tragedy, and finally, undergo the suffering of war. The bee is seen as symbolic of the collective identity of the Slovak nation.

The next film event is tentatively scheduled for June 2007 and will be announced on the FOS website and through an e-mail distribution list. Please contact the Friends of Slovakia if you would like to have your name added to the mailing list. ♦

Slovaks and Carpatho-Rusyns Share Similarities Yet Have Differences

Slovakia is a land of many peoples, and in Eastern Slovakia, one of the most numerous are the Carpatho-Rusyns. Having lived alongside one another for about 700 years, Rusyns and Slovaks share many cultural traits. But they are two peoples from two distinct cultures, who also differ from one another in dramatic ways.

What are those similarities and differences? That was the topic of a recent talk co-sponsored by the Slovak American Society of Washington, The National Capital Chapter of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, and the Slovak Embassy. The guest lecturer was National Carpatho-Rusyn Society President, John Righetti, who addressed a standing-room-only audience in the Embassy's main hall.

"Slovaks and Rusyns have lived with each other for so long that to some, it is sometimes hard to tell the difference," explained Righetti, who has lectured extensively throughout the U.S. on East European topics and has led multiple tours to the Rusyn-inhabited regions of Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine. Mr. Righetti outlined the settlement of eastern Slovakia by Rusyns and Slovaks—Rusyns coming from the east and Slovaks from the west—and discussed the similarities. "If Rusyns and East Slovaks eat similar foods and dress in similar ways, this is to be expected because food and clothing are influenced by weather and topography – what the weather is like and what kinds of things you can grow. If you live in the same place, these items should be similar," he explained.

But he also outlined the dramatic differences between the two groups: Rusyns entirely rooted in Eastern Byzantine culture complete with Eastern Christian religion, Cyrillic alphabet, and East Slavic language; Slovaks rooted in Western Christianity complete with Latin alphabet and West Slavic language. "It became harder after the 1870s when active Magyarization policies forced the Latin alphabet on a portion of the Rusyn population and an ever-growing Latinization and westernization approach was taken."

"Today, Rusyns and Slovaks both live in Slovakia, and the current Slovak government is supportive of Rusyn culture," Righetti said. Both need to respect one another and understand that Slovakia is a native land for both." ♦

Slovak League of America Celebrates Centennial

This month marks the 100th anniversary of a special event in Slovak history—the founding of the Slovak League of America, a civic and cultural federation of Americans of Slovak ancestry. The large population of Slovaks that emigrated to the U.S. during the late 19th and early 20th centuries remained concerned about events in Europe. Slovaks had endured more than a thousand years of Hungarian political domination, and as conditions continued to worsen, Slovaks in America sought to support their brethren. Led by fraternal leaders Rev. Stephen Furdek of the First Catholic Slovak Union and Peter V. Rovnianek of the National Slovak Society, nearly 10,000 Slovaks, representing a variety of organizations and churches, gathered in Cleveland in May 1907 to form the umbrella organization.

The Slovak League supported Slovaks domestically, but also played a key role in supporting Slovaks' quest for freedom and self-determination in Europe throughout the 20th century. The League played a key role in the Cleveland and Pittsburgh Agreements that led to the emergence of the Czecho-Slovak Republic. When the events leading to World War II resulted in an independent Slovak state, the league advocated for its recognition while fully supporting the U.S. war effort at home with a hugely successful war bond drive. With the re-emergence of a post-war Czecho-Slovak state, and the unfortunate turn to Communism, the League continued its diligent advocacy for Slovaks' aspirations for freedom. Then, with the coming of the "Velvet Revolution" and the subsequent "Velvet

Divorce", the League served as a key supporter of improvement in Slovak social, political and economic life.

In celebrating its centennial year, the League has sponsored a tour to Slovakia, which includes a historical seminar, a meeting with Slovak President Gasparovich, and the dedication of a statue of League co-founder Rev. Furdek. Also, the Slovak Republic will issue a commemorative postage stamp in honor of the founding of the League. Finally, the League will hold an anniversary dinner on Sunday, June 10, 2007 at the Crown Plaza Hotel at the Meadowlands in New Jersey. FOS extends to the Slovak League, and its current National President, Daniel F. Tanzone, its congratulations and best wishes! ♦

Mark your calendar!

1968–1980: Prague Spring, Normalization, and Charter 77

March 6, 7, & 8, 2008

**National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library
Marriott Hotel and Conference Center
Cedar Rapids, IA**

The 2008 Czech and Slovak History and Culture Conference takes a close look at the twelve volatile years in Czechoslovakia from 1968 to 1980. Socialism with a human face...Alexander Dubček and the Prague Spring...Warsaw Pact invasion... Normalization...the anticommunist movement that culminated in Charter 77, these topics and more will be examined by top scholars and through first-hand accounts.

**Watch the NCSML Web site for more details: www.NCSML.org
To put your name on the conference mailing list, email Jan@NCSML.org**



Slovak Foreign Minister Jan Kubis enjoys his meeting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

FRIENDS OF SLOVAKIA APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP – 2007

Minimum contribution for an annual membership to Friends of Slovakia is:

- \$35 for individuals
- \$250 for Fraternal and other non-profit organizations
- \$2,500 for companies interested but not currently doing business in Slovakia
- \$5,000 for companies currently operating in Slovakia

Note: Companies not doing substantial business in Slovakia may wish to make a contribution to individual FOS initiatives and participate as a non-member in selected FOS events.

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

- Yes, I would like to become **a new member** of Friends of Slovakia
- Yes, I would like to **renew** my membership of Friends of Slovakia

My Membership contribution: \$ _____

In addition to the membership fee, I would like to contribute \$ _____ to the following FOS project (please check appropriate box):

- FOS Scholarship Fund
- Corporate Involvement in Slovakia
- General Contribution to FOS
- Visa Waiver Program

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

TEL: _____

FAX: _____

EMAIL: _____

FOS WALL OF HONOR PLAQUE

- If you would like to receive some information on how you can get your name, family name or the name of a loved one on the Friends of Slovakia Wall of Honor (located on the grounds of the Slovak Embassy in Washington, DC) please check this box.

Please send this form with your check, payable to *Friends of Slovakia*, to:

Friends of Slovakia
P.O. Box 40733
Washington, DC 20016-0733

For more information, please go to: www.friendsofslovakia.org



Friends of Slovakia **NEWSLETTER**

P.O. Box 40733
Washington, DC 20016-0733
703-671-0926
<http://www.friendsofslovakia.org>

Holiday Party at the Slovak Ambassador's Residence

On December 18th, following the FOS Board of Directors' meeting, Ambassador and Mrs. Kacer hosted a gracious holiday party for members of the Board of Directors and Board of Advisors and their families. The residence was festively decorated and the buffet was delicious. As always, FOS appreciates the support and encouragement it receives from the Kacers and we are particularly grateful for their continuing hospitality.

Wall of Honor

The Friends of Slovakia Wall of Honor, located on the terrace of the Slovak Embassy, is a splendid way for Americans of Slovak heritage and all who are interested in Slovakia to honor family and friends. There is a good choice of plaque sizes – ranging from being listed on each year's group plaque to a 16x16 inch individual plaque. This allows for a donation range that fits most every budget!

Each year, in September, the new plaques are unveiled at the Embassy's Constitution Day Reception. As part of the celebration, all donors are invited to attend and have both a group and individual photograph taken with the Ambassador at the Wall.

Because we have had such generous support for the Wall of Honor and for Friends of Slovakia, we are in the process of adding a new section of the Wall. At the same time, we will have the current wall re-surfaced and the plaques polished and reset on the Wall.

In an effort to ensure that the plaques (which are prepared at a Slovak foundry near Bratislava) are completed in time for the September reception, our annual deadline for receipt of inscription text and payment is June 15th. All donations to FOS, except for annual membership dues, count towards an inscription or plaque on the Wall of Honor.

For information on plaque size, donation requirements, and inscription text please visit our website or contact FOS Secretary, Julie Slavik, at jlslavik@aol.com or call her at 202-966-6032.