



# Friends of Slovakia NEWSLETTER

Volume 7, Issue 3 • Fall 2008

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## Lunch for Slovak President Ivan Gasparovic

FOS and the Embassy of Slovakia co-hosted a luncheon on Wednesday, October 8 at the Washington Golf & Country Club for President Ivan Gasparovic and First Lady Silvia Gasparovic and a distinguished Slovak delegation. The Slovak president was in Washington leading a delegation of Slovak government officials for a meeting with President Bush on October 9 and with other high-level U.S. government officials later in the week.



FOS board with Pres. & Mrs. Gasparovic

Present at the luncheon were Slovak Foreign Minister Ján Kubis, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Róbert Kalinak, Minister of Culture Marek Madaric, U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Vincent Obsitnik, Slovak Ambassador to the U.N. Peter Burian and acting Chargé d'Affaires at the Slovak Embassy Andrej Droba along with other Slovak officials.

Representing the FOS Board of Directors was Ambassador Ted Russell, Joe Senko, Julie Slavik, Kenneth Bombara and Bill Tucker. Ambassador Julian M. Niemczyk and Juraj Slavik, Members of the FOS Board of Advisors, were also present.

The activities of FOS were discussed during the luncheon and the President in his remarks thanked FOS for its work in building stronger relations between the U.S. and Slovakia. President Gasparovic and the government ministers present at the luncheon expressed positive interest in FOS's plan to host another gala dinner in Bratislava in November 2009 celebrating visa free travel for Slovaks to the US, Slovakia's economic progress and entry into the Euro zone.

At the conclusion of the luncheon, FOS presented one of its Medals of Honor to both the president and his wife. FOS also presented Mrs. Gasparovic with a \$500 donation for the foundation in Slovakia that bears her name. ♦



Pres. Ivan Gasparovic and Amb. Ted Russell



Bill Tucker and Julie Slavik present the FOS Medal of Honor to Mrs. Gasparovic

## Young Slovak Virtuoso to Perform at Kennedy Center

George Z. Mesko, M.D. has kindly alerted FOS to a forthcoming concert at the Kennedy Center January 31 in which an award winning Slovak double bassist Roman Patkolo will perform with Anne-Sophie Mutter. The concert is entitled "Andre at 80: An Evening with Andre Previn and Anne-Sophie Mutter." The program includes works by Hayden, Mozart, Previn and R. Strauss. Mr. Patolko, a winner of many prestigious international music awards, is a member of the internationally renowned virtuoso Bass Sextet Bassiona Amorosa. He combines his solo career with work as a principal in the Zurich Opera. For tickets, please visit the Kennedy Center website, [www.kennedy-center.org](http://www.kennedy-center.org). ♦

## FOS Awards Medals at Dinner Honoring Slovak-Americans



**Frederick Frank receives Medal of Honor From Amb. Ted Russell**

FOS Chairman Joe Senko and his wife Albina organized the fourth biennial Testimonial Awards Dinner of the Western Pennsylvania Slovak Cultural Association in Pittsburgh on September 14. The distinguished Slovak Americans honored for their contributions to Western Pennsylvania during this event were Frederick N. Frank, Director of the Slovak American Enterprise Fund, Gregory C.



**FOS Medal of Honor Awardees in Pittsburgh**

Fajt, Governor Rendell's Chief of Staff, The Most Reverend David A. Zubik, Bishop of Pittsburgh, David G. Blazek, National President of the National Slovak Society and Rudy and Sue Ondrejco of the Pittsburgh Slovaks and the Western Pennsylvania Radio Hour.

During the gala event, FOS Founding Chairman, Ambassador Ted Russell presented the awardees with the newly minted FOS Medal of Honor. The medal was designed by a leading Washington sculptor and features the bust of General Rastislav Stefanik and an American eagle. ♦

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## Study in the US: FOS Scholarship Program Now Recruiting for Summer 2009

In the summers of 2004,-2008, FOS provided partial support for Slovak students to participate in the summer programs of the Fund for American Studies. We are once again able to sponsor a number of qualified students for the 2009 program with partial scholarships. Students must meet the criteria set by Georgetown University and the Fund for American Studies in order to be considered for an FOS Scholarship.

The programs of the Fund for American Studies take place at Georgetown University in Washington, DC and allow participants not only to increase their knowledge by taking courses on topics of interest but also to interact with students from many of the top universities in the US, including the military academies and Ivy League Universities. The programs are structured as follows: Classes are taught by Georgetown University profes-

sors in the mornings, following by afternoon internship at companies, organizations or government offices throughout Washington, DC. The internship portion of the program gives the student some practical work experience in the United States. Students may apply to the **Engalitcheff Institute on Comparative Political and Economic Systems (ICPES), the Institute on Political Journalism (IPJ), Bryce Harlow Institute on Business and Government Affairs (IBGA), or the Institute on Philanthropy and Voluntary Service (IPVS).**

Students who are interested should complete their online applications **as soon as possible** and follow the specific application instructions for international students. The application is available at [www.dcinternships.org](http://www.dcinternships.org). The

application deadline for Slovak students is **January 15, 2009**. Students should also send a copy of their applications to the Co-Chairs of FOS's Scholarship Committee, Dr. Sharon Wolchik, IERES, George Washington University, by email at [Wolchik@gwu.edu](mailto:Wolchik@gwu.edu) or [swolchik@gmail.com](mailto:swolchik@gmail.com), and to Dr. Sharon Fisher, Global Insight, [sharon.fisher@globalinsight.com](mailto:sharon.fisher@globalinsight.com) with a copy to William Tucker, Vice Chairman of FOS, and a former board member of the Fund for American Studies. William Tucker's email is: [tuckintl@radix.net](mailto:tuckintl@radix.net).

If a scholarship is requested, an application for a scholarship must be submitted to the Fund for American Studies and to Drs. Wolchik and Fisher and Mr. Tucker. Interested students who have questions may contact Mary Connell, Recruitment and Admissions Manager, at [mconnell@tfas.org](mailto:mconnell@tfas.org). ♦

## Slovakia in 2008

By Sharon Fisher

Overall, the year 2008 was a positive one for Slovakia, particularly on the economic front, as the approval of Eurozone membership brought added stability to the country. Despite the global slowdown, the Slovak economy performed relatively well, benefiting from reform measures taken by the 2002-06 cabinet. Several foreign investors ramped up production, while falling unemployment and rising wages drove household demand.

Despite skepticism over Slovak inflation prospects, European Union (EU) authorities backed the country's Eurozone membership in mid-2008, with accession scheduled for January 2009. Slovakia was the second state in post-communist Europe—after Slovenia—to be admitted to the Eurozone, and others were at least several years behind. Although many Slovaks were nervous that euro adoption could negatively impact inflation, the approval of Eurozone accession was nonetheless a source of pride. Indeed, Eurozone entry helped Slovakia to escape much of the turmoil from the international financial crisis. While other new EU member states have suffered from sharp shifts in their currencies vis-à-vis the euro, Eurozone accession will protect Slovakia against exchange rate fluctuations and should therefore raise investor

confidence. The final koruna/euro conversion rate was set at 30.126, a level that is much stronger than originally expected and up from an average of 33.78/euro in 2007.

While Eurozone entry approval had a positive impact on the government's popularity, Prime Minister Robert Fico received another boost from abroad in February, as the Party of European Socialists (PES) readmitted his party, Smer [Direction]. The PES, an umbrella group for left-wing parties within the EU, had suspended Smer's membership after the 2006 elections, when Fico formed a government with two parties that are seen as outside the European mainstream, particularly in the case of the far-right Slovak National Party (SNS). According to the PES, the decision to restore Smer's membership was based on Fico's demonstrated social-democratic orientation and commitment to minority rights. In addition, Fico's favorable attitude toward further European integration, including euro adoption, was probably a factor as well.

From a political standpoint, Slovakia was quite stable in 2008, as the ruling parties continued to register strong public support, while the opposition struggled to find its voice. The ruling coalition was not without controversy and scandal in 2008, as three ministers were replaced and calls were made for the resignation of several

others. Still, the opposition had few tools to use against the ruling coalition, particularly given the country's strong economic performance.

One issue of particular concern to the opposition was a controversial press bill that was seen as limiting pluralism. The opposition parties tried to tie the press bill to the ratification of the EU Reform Treaty, blocking the treaty's approval as long as the government insisted on the press bill. The Reform Treaty needed to be ratified by at least 90 deputies in the 150-member parliament, but the ruling coalition held only 85 seats. After several months of wrangling, the parliament backed both documents in April, and the opposition parties' tactics failed as one of the three—the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK)—ended up voting in favor of the Reform Treaty.

From a business perspective, the investment environment continued to deteriorate modestly in 2008, a trend that began after Fico took office. In June, the Business Alliance of Slovakia (PAS) warned that if this tendency continues, Slovakia's economic growth potential and living standards will rise slower than originally expected over the coming years. In 2007, GDP per capita in purchasing power terms reached just 69% of the EU average (up from 50% in 2000), making Slovakia the poorest Eurozone member. ♦

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## FOS Helps with Flood Relief

In June 2008 the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library was extensively damaged by the floods that ripped through downtown Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Some of this damage was not covered by insurance. In order to help with the restoration, Friends of Slovakia issued a plea for contributions. To date, 22 people responded to our request with a total of \$2270 which has been remitted to the museum. Once again, we thank these donors for their generosity:

Friends of Slovakia  
Marian & Brian Farrell  
Robert Svitek  
Mary Latka  
Michel & Winifred Chevalier  
Anne-Marie Gabor  
Daniel & Ingrid Keleti

William Macey  
David Cosby  
Samuel & Christine Cernek  
Barbara & Edward Wentling  
Anthony Horecky  
Vera Pachasa  
Mary & Sara Kristof

Barbara & Ivan Viest  
F. Robert Horecky  
George Gilbert  
Leo & Sylvia Mulvihill  
Vincent & Annemarie Obsitnik  
Anne Kenderes  
Josef Laposa ♦

## Gasparovic Visits Pittsburgh

Ivan Gasparovic, President of Slovakia, was invited to the White House on Thursday, October 9, 2008. After meeting with President Bush, Mr. & Mrs. Gasparovic traveled to Pittsburgh accompanied by Marek Madaric, Minister of Culture, and Robert Kalinak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior media. Also with them were Slovak embassy personnel, representatives of the Slovak media and others.

The presidential couple was hosted at a dinner given by FOS Chairman and Honorary Consul Joe Senko and his wife, Albina.

On Friday, Pres. Gasparovic first met with Luke Ravenstahl, Mayor of Pittsburgh, and his staff, followed by a meeting at the national headquarters of U.S. Steel Corp. The meeting included all the former presidents of U.S. Steel Kosice – John Goodish, Chris Navetta and Dave Lohr - and other key executives.

During the meeting at U.S. Steel, Mrs. Gasparovicova and Mrs. Senko visited a women's shelter in Pittsburgh. The first lady, who has a foundation in Slovakia, gathered information to start a similar

shelter back home. Before lunch, Mr. Gasparovic and his staff went to the Mellon Arena to see a Pittsburgh Penguins hockey team practice. Slovak player Miroslav Satan presented an autographed Penguin jersey to the president, an avid hockey fan.

Later the president and his group visited the University of Pittsburgh Cathedral of Learning where they met with Chancellor Mark Nordenberg. The meeting included a discussion about the possibility of a joint program with Slovak universities. While at the university, the President visited the Czechoslovak Room, one of 27 nationality classrooms at the university, and toured the Heinz History Center with museum president, Andrew Masich. The day concluded with a reception at the LeMont Restaurant overlooking the city. Approximately 150 people attended the



**Tamburitzen dancers entertain President and Mrs. Gasparovic and John Goodish of US Steel**

festive event. The world-famous Duquesne University Tamburitzans provided the entertainment. The President and his entourage were very impressed with the energetic and professional dancers.

On Saturday morning, the President and his group flew back to Slovak directly from Pittsburgh ♦

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## CSIS Conference on New Allies and the New U.S. Administration: Priorities for CEE-US Relations, October 2, 2008

Together with American Friends of the Czech Republic, the Hungarian American Coalition, the American Polish Forum and several other Central and Eastern European Diaspora community representative organizations, Friends of Slovakia co-sponsored a well attended international conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on October 2.

The theme was "New Allies and the New US Administration: Priorities for CEE-U.S. Relations." Kori Schake representing Senator John McCain and Phil Gordon (speaking on background) representing Senator Obama were principal speakers.

Other distinguished speakers included Dr. Jeffrey Simon from the National Defense University, Prof. Steven Blank from the US Army War College and Christopher Medalis from the Institute of International Education. The conference was chaired by the Director of the CSIS New European Democracies Project, Janusz Bugajski. Representatives from a number of CEE Diaspora community organizations, think tanks, embassies, the media and US government organizations attended.



**Janusz Bugajski, center, chairs CSIS panel**

The conference agenda and an audio and video broadcast of the proceedings including Dr. Schake's remarks and Q&A on US-European cooperation, Georgia, a League of Democracies and US-Russian relations are on the CSIS website [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org). ♦

## Bratislava Sends New Chief of Mission to Washington

The Slovak Embassy in Washington, DC has a new ambassador as of this month. He is Peter Burian, whose most recent assignment was as head of the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the United Nations. In that position he also served two years as the permanent representative of Eastern Europe on the Security Council.

Previous posts include Brussels, Prague and Beirut. More importantly, he has already served in Washington. In the 1990s he was in the Czechoslovak Embassy. After the division of that country in 1993, he became the charge d'affaires in the new Slovak embassy and later on deputy to Amb. Branislav Lichardus who is on the FOS Board of Advisors.

In a recent press release in *The Slovak Spectator*, Amb. Burian said that Slovakia will start preparing a bilateral agreement on social welfare with the United States of America.

“Many people already work on both sides [of the Atlantic] and need to solve the issue of pensions, etc. We



**Ambassador Peter Burian**

will start working on the agreement on social welfare at the bilateral level,” Burian said.

He also wants to search for new investors in Washington, intensify economic relations and press on the

US administration not to turn away Slovaks who obtained confirmation through the new electronic system for members of Visa Waiver countries. ♦

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## Slovaks Gain Visa Free US Entry

On October 28 in Bratislava Secretary of Homeland Security Chertoff and Slovak Interior Minister Kalinak announced the expansion of the Visa Waiver Program to include citizens and nationals of the Slovak Republic. The program was also extended to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and South Korea. Visa free travel for Slovaks begins on November 17, the 19th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. In making the announcement, Secretary Chertoff recalled the significance of October 28 and November 17 in Czech and Slovak his-

tory and termed the admission of Slovakia into the program a symbol of the shared respect for freedom of our two countries.

As agreed with the Slovak authorities, travelers benefiting from the Visa Waiver Program will need a biometric passport, an electronic travel authorization (ESTA) and the trip must be for 90 days or less.

US and Slovak representatives worked long and hard to bring Slovakia into the program. Friends of Slovakia strongly supported this

effort as well as the entry of other qualified Central European countries. The issue was a major agenda item during October 9 talks between President Bush and President Gasparovic in Washington. Last year FOS co-sponsored with the Center for Security and International Studies and American Friends of the Czech Republic a well attended Forum for Congressional staffers on the issue addressed by speakers from Homeland Security, the State Department and the Center for European Policy Analysis. ♦

## FOS Wall of Honor Expands

The Friends of Slovakia Wall of Honor is such a popular way for people to honor family, friends, and their Slovak heritage that it has now expanded to a new section in the garden of the Slovak Embassy. The cast bronze Wall of Honor plaques are a permanent tribute to loved ones and serve to support the work and mission of Friends of Slovakia. FOS also acknowledges its growing number of business and corporate donors, both in Slovakia and the United States, with Wall of Honor plaques. The FOS Wall of Honor plaques are made in Slovakia as part of FOS's ongoing commitment to supporting Slovak artisans and commerce.

On September 16, 2008, as part of the Slovak Embassy's celebration of Constitution Day, many new plaques went on display for the first time. Several hundred guests admired the Wall and we were pleased to welcome plaque donors.

As we approach the end of 2008, your tax deductible contribution for a listing on the group plaque or an individual plaque would be most welcome. The deadline for receipt of your contribution and inscription is **April 20, 2009**. Plaque information is below, and a plaque donation/inscription form is included in this newsletter.

### Plaque Price List and Specifications

Size of Plaque	Individual Cost	Organization/Corporation Cost	Specifications
Group	\$250-\$999	\$1,000-\$2,499	1 line, 30 characters
4x4	\$1,000-\$4,999	\$2,500-\$4,999	3 lines, 11 characters each
4x8	\$5,000-\$9,999	\$5,000-\$9,999	2 lines, 19 characters each
8x8	\$10,000-\$14,999	\$10,000-\$14,999	3 lines, 19 characters each
Larger plaques are available and range in contribution levels from \$15,000 to more than \$50,000. For additional information, please contact Julie Slavik at <a href="mailto:JLJSlavik@aol.com">JLJSlavik@aol.com</a> .			

## FOS Thanks Donors of the Newly Installed Wall of Honor Plaques

In September 2008, new plaques were installed on the FOS Wall of Honor in the garden of the Slovak Embassy in Washington. Due to circumstances beyond FOS's control, the plaques spanned several years of donations. Every effort has been made to ensure a complete listing of the donors of the new plaques. FOS thanks each of its donors for their support and generosity to FOS and the Wall of Honor. In particular, FOS thanks those listed below whose plaques were installed in 2008.

BEZ Transformatory, a.s.

Czech and Slovak Heritage Association,  
Baltimore, MD

The Durisek and Ochodnický Families

Eco-Invest, a.s.

Frederick N. Frank

Gamo, a.s.

Martha Parke Gibian

Gratex International

Paula A. Harvan

Daniel A. Heyl

Mr. and Mrs. Michael Kisska

Kevin Kisska

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KPMG Slovakia

Stephen Linko

Lockheed Martin

Brooks and Olga Gallik McClure

Mr. and Mrs. David Mehigan

Microsoft Slovakia

Col. (R) and Mrs. John R Miller

Allyson and Peter Muzila

Northrup Grumman, Manassas, VA.

Karol, Darina, and Darinka Pavlu

Richard M. Porvaznik

Raytheon

Scott and Stephanie Salmon

Chris and Kathryn Schulze

Joseph and Albina Senko

Juraj and Julie Slavik

Slovak Catholic Sokol, Assembly 26,  
Campbell, OH

Squire, Sanders & Dempsey LLP

Jan and Lenka Surotchak

U.S. Steel

U.S. Steel Kosice

Volkswagen of America

Zapadoslovenska energetica



Joe Senko, FOS chairman, and Charge d'affaires Andrej Droba listen to Julie Slavik at Constitution Day party

## FOS Wall of Honor Inscription Form

Yes, I wish to donate \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for a Friends of Slovakia Wall of Honor plaque.  
 My check is enclosed.

**Please check below:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ One line of 30 characters to be inscribed on the group plaque  
 (Individual donation from \$250-\$999; organization/corporation from \$1,000-\$2,499)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4x4 plaque with 3 lines of 11 characters each.  
 (Individual donation of \$1,000-\$4,999; organization/corporation from \$2,500-\$4,999)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4x8 plaque with 2 lines of 19 characters each  
 (Donation of \$5,000 - \$9,999)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8x8 plaque with 2 lines of 19 characters each  
 (Donation of \$10,000-\$14,900)

**Inscription: Please print.**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please complete the following: Please print**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE SEND THIS COMPLETED FORM TO

Friends of Slovakia  
 Attn: Julie Slavik  
 PO Box 40733  
 Washington, DC 20016-0733

It must be received before April 20, 2009 to ensure processing and to meet the production deadline.  
 If you have any questions, please call Julie Slavik at 202-966-6032 or by email at JLJSlavik@aol.com.

THANK YOU

## Center Founded to Study Eastern European Democracies

**F**ormer ambassador to Slovakia and FOS board member Ronald Weiser and his wife Eileen have donated \$10 million to the University of Michigan International Institute. The Weisers, alumni of the university, have created several academic efforts to promote the study of how democracies are created and sustained.

Within the International Institute will be the Ronald and Eileen Weiser Center, an umbrella organization for three centers focused on studies of Russia and Europe, of Europe and the European Union and of emerging democracies. The monies also fund a professorship and fellowships for graduate students as well as collaboration with institutions abroad. Already there are

partnerships between the Michigan faculty and colleagues in Slovakia.

Amb. Weiser said that ever since he went to Slovakia in 2001, he has been interested in why some countries achieve democracy and others don't. He believes that the lessons learned by newly created democracies can be shared with countries still struggling for political freedom. He sees this new center as a means to that end.

"In Europe and Eurasia are some of the best examples of places that have achieved democracy and freedom. It is very important to understand how these countries transitioned and to share that information with countries that are in transition," Amb. Weiser stated.

Prof. Michael Kennedy, the new director of the Weiser Center and the Weiser Professor said, "Our center's mission is inspired by the historical experience of Slovakia and the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe with their mobilization of civil society, development of democratic institutions, and cultivation of peaceful relationships with neighbors." ♦



**Amb. Ronald and Mrs. Eileen Weiser**

## 2009 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

- Yes, I would like to renew/start my annual individual membership and enclosed is my \$35 membership contribution for 2009.
- Yes, I would like to renew/start my annual organization/fraternal membership and enclosed is my \$250 membership contribution for 2009.
- Yes, I would like to renew/start my corporate membership and enclosed is my 2009 membership contribution (\$2,500 for companies interested in doing business in Slovakia; \$5,000 for those currently doing business in Slovakia) \$\_\_\_\_\_
- Yes, I would like to renew/start my membership and enclosed is my \$\_\_\_\_\_ membership contribution for 2009 and an additional contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ for the following FOS sponsored program (please check one):
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> FOS Scholarship Fund              | <input type="checkbox"/> Visa Liberalization Issue   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Involvement in Slovakia | <input type="checkbox"/> General contribution to FOS |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel/Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send form to: **Friends of Slovakia, P.O. Box 40733, Washington, DC 20016-0733**

FOS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization



### Friends of Slovakia NEWSLETTER

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