



AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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REMEMBER AFoCR

Max Britton and his wife Vera Kamilla Marz Britton were well known in the Czech American community in Washington. Max was a well-known and highly respected Arctic research scientist and administrator. Max died in March 2004 several months after his wife Vera died. He was 92 at this death.

Max's Bachelor's degree was from Indiana State College, his Master's was from Ohio State, and his PhD was from Northwestern University. Max Britton had an early start as a research scientist, starting in his freshman year. The highlight of his career came as a researcher in what was referred to as Britton Manor in the Arctic tundra.

The Brittons were also committed to the Czech American Community. In his will, Dr. Britton remembered the American Friends of the Czech Republic. In August of this year, James Duran, long-time friend of the Brittons and executor of the estate presented AFoCR President Michael Rokos and members of the AFoCR Board with a bequest from the Brittons.



Because AFoCR is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, there are benefits to one's estate in making a bequest to AFoCR. But more importantly, the vital work of AFoCR can continue with greater financial resources.

It has been over 15 years since the communist regime was overthrown in Prague, but the work of AFoCR is not done. One of the hallmarks of AFoCR during its ten years of existence is that it has always responded to the new challenges presented. AFoCR came into existence to help bring about NATO membership for the Czech Republic. Once that was accomplished, the organization looked for and found new challenges. AFoCR created a memorial to Tomáš G. Masaryk in Washington, raised significant funds for flood relief in the Czech Republic, and now finds itself at the front of the Visa issue that is a major international problem for the US. In addition to your regular donations to AFoCR, we encourage you to think in terms of a bequest to AFoCR to help insure that we will always be here to respond to new challenges.

TGM MEMORIAL WALL OF HONOR UNVEILED

The construction of the T.G. Masaryk Memorial Wall of Honor was completed in October, thus completing the Masaryk Memorial Project. The Wall of Honor now rests in a garden sitting adjacent to the Embassy of the Czech Republic. It was unveiled at a special ceremony at the Embassy as part of the annual National Day commemoration on October 28, 2005.

The Wall of Honor is a permanent memorial that names and honors those who made exceptional contributions to build the Masaryk Memorial. The result of collaboration between AFoCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the wall now becomes a permanent addition at the Embassy. During the ceremony, Ambassador Palous expressed his appreciation for the efforts of all who supported the Masaryk Memorial Project and assisted AFoCR Directors Mike Rokos and Phil Kasik with the unveiling. Past Pres. Milton Cerny also took part.

Also presented to Ambassador Palous by AFoCR during the ceremony was the Masaryk Memorial Book of Honor. The Book lists over 2000 individuals, organizations, associations and foundations who contributed to the Masaryk Memorial. Listed in the book are the names of Czech cities, regions and companies that made contributions to the Memorial.

During the unveiling ceremony, AFoCR Director Phil Kasik acknowledged many of the contributors to the project. Without those generous donations and support, the Memorial could never have been built. In describing the Masaryk Project, he noted that the project resulted in the realization of a vision for a Czech Memorial in Washington, D.C. The project started in 2001 with an international effort led by AFoCR to secure the site, design the memorial and raise the funds needed to build it. The project culminated within a memorable ceremony on Massachusetts Avenue in September 2002. In which the magnificent bronze statue of T.G. Masaryk was dedicated. President Havel, Secretary of State Madeline Albright and many others participated in the dedication.

With the unveiling of the Wall of Honor Phil declared that the Memorial Project complete. However, he noted that the Masaryk Memorial would continue as a perpetual symbol of the historic links between the people of the United States and the people of the Czech and Slovak lands. The Memorial will be maintained by AFoCR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and serves as the principal Washington venue to celebrate these historic ties of friendship and the values of freedom, democracy and human rights.

The United States Must Solve the Visa Issue

In recent years there is an ever increasing concern about the difficulties Czechs, and others in Central and Eastern Europe, have with obtaining American visas to visit the United States for pleasure or business. High costs of applying for a visa, regardless of the outcome of the application, are also of concern. We hear of cases in which two spouses apply for visitors' visas and one is refused. There are cases when successful businessmen and women who are self-employed are unable to obtain business visas.

The problem has become a serious public relations issue for the U.S. in the Czech Republic, and other emerging democracies, which must be dealt with expeditiously although AFoCR recognizes that it will be a lengthy process. President Bush and his administration recognize that there is a dire need to solve the problem as evidenced by his statement to large gathering in downtown Bratislava, Slovakia "We are working with your government to make it easier for Slovaks to travel to the United States." There were several high-level contacts between our Department of State and several allies of the United States in Central and Eastern Europe. The U.S. established a country specific "road-map" for each country considered for a change and established bi-lateral "working groups" to monitor implementation. We at AFoCR studied the issue thoroughly and we want to share with you the following thoughts:

Who determines the qualifications for the U.S. "Visa Waiver" program?

Laws of the United States, as passed by Congress, determine the requirements.

What is the key provision in the law?

The "magic number" is 3%. Namely, any country subject to a U.S. visa regime for which the "visa refusal rate" is greater than 3% automatically does not qualify. It is important to note that the "refusal rate" score is not available.

What are other factors?

One of the ingredients in the consideration process is the number of "overstays". An "overstay" is when a visitor does not leave the U.S. on time. Another is the number of (Czech) citizens who are working illegally. The fact is that there are no exact data available for these categories.

What is the fundamental flaw in current U.S. law?

We believe that in the post 9/11 world we live in, the emphasis in U.S. visitors' admission policy should be on our national security considerations and not the obsession with prevention of illegal immigration.

Why the high cost of obtaining a U.S. visitor visa?

To begin with the \$ 100 visa application fee is high by Czech (and other Central European) standards. To compound the problem, the fee is a processing fee and not a visa fee. Thus, once an applicant is turned and he/she decides to reapply another fee is due. Attempts to change this policy by some well-meaning U.S. diplomats were unsuccessful due to the State Department's budgetary considerations.

What is the present situation?

Now we must let the government of the Czech Republic to work on the "road map". The educational campaign is soon to go public. Czech passport will include in the future the biometric data required by the U.S. The refusal rate seems to be improving and we believe that with increasing opportunities within the European Union it will continue to drop.

What does the future hold?

Just like the time before Czech-Hungarian-Polish NATO expansion, we intend to play again a positive educational role to enable Czech-Americans and other friends of the Czech Republic to get the Czech Republic into the U.S. Visa Waiver Program. Czechs, America's NATO allies, supporters of the U.S. in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq deserve no less.

Can we answer any of your questions?

Peter A. Rafaeli, our Vice President, spearheads our efforts for us. He can be reached by e-mail at cz.consul.phl@juno.com or by phone at 215-646-7777

Ambassador Palouš Completes Term

His Excellency Martin Palouš completed his term as Czech Ambassador to the United States on Friday, November 18th. Ambassador Palouš arrived in the US just a few days after September 11, 2001, obviously at a time of great uncertainty on many fronts, but with the clear conviction of Czech support for the US.

During Ambassador Palouš's term here, he saw the dedication of the Masaryk Memorial in Washington, and worked hard to further cement the good relations between the US and the Czech Republic. Ambassador Palouš, who was an early signer of Charter 77 (an important Human Rights Document from the days of the Communist oppression in Czechoslovakia), made important contributions working to encourage Human Rights in Cuba.

Ambassador and Mrs. Palouš will spend the rest of this year in the Czech Republic, and are scheduled to return to the US in January when Mr. Palouš will take up his new post as Czech Ambassador to the United Nations.

AFoCR honored Ambassador Palouš at a farewell dinner on the 28th of October. The Ambassador's last official act on November 17th was to deliver the Thomas Gibian Lecture at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. The Lecture is sponsored annually by the American Friends of the Czech Republic and the Friends of Slovakia.

Picture Key: From L-R

Wall Unveiling; AFoCR President Rokos, Cerny, & Kasik; Phil Kasik & Ambassador Palouš at the Wall; AFoCR Farewell Dinner for Ambassador Palouš; Press Secretary Petr Janousek; Ambassador Palouš & AFoCR President Rokos at Fare-



*October 28, 2005 National Day
Unveiling the Wall of Honor, Ambassador's Farewell Dinner*



President Havel's Visit to U.S. in 2005



AFoCR President Rokos presenting gifts to President and Mrs. Havel

President and Mrs. Havel spent an evening with AFoCR members and others from the Czech American community at the residence of Ambassador Palous.



Ambassador Palous, Mrs. Havel, and Former President Havel



Former President Havel at National Press Club in May 2005

The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe: Quo Vadis?

As a Masters student in Foreign Service at Georgetown University, the Advocacy Project, a DC-based NGO, hired me to work as a consultant and journalist with the Dženo Association in the Czech Republic. Dženo is an NGO that focuses on improving the socio-political situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe by increasing awareness and influencing international actions concerning Roma. At Dženo, I published almost 70 articles and recorded a number of online radio newscasts, aimed at informing the general public on the effects on the Romany population of elections, EU expansion, migration, etc.

The Roma are by far Europe's largest minority, often suffering from discrimination and sub-standard living conditions. The United Nations recently expressed its concern over increasing instances of racism and xenophobia in the Czech Republic (1250 racially motivated attacks against Roma since 1989), and the failure of authorities to investigate, prosecute, and punish such crimes. In July 2002, the U.N. Human Rights Committee concluded that the Czech Republic's anti-discrimination legislation was inadequate.

Educational inequalities are also pervasive. Romany children continue to be warehoused in "special" (read: substandard) schools for the mentally handicapped. Subsequently, they lack the skills to compete in the increasingly skill-oriented Czech workforce, raising the estimated Romany unemployment rate to 70-90%, compared with the national rate of 5%.

The Roma rights campaign, coupled with heightened pressure from the EU and the UN to conform to human rights standards, is leading to new anti-discrimination laws and minority rights bills aimed at combating racial violence and protecting Roma and other minorities in the Czech Republic and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. This summer saw some of the first convictions in the accession states for acts of discrimination against Roma. While tougher legislation is a necessary step, only through continued pressure from human rights and diaspora groups and the EU will real progress be made. With great change comes great opportunity, and the EU must not let this one slip past.

AFoCR Helps Goes Hollywood

AFoCR was contacted in mid-October by Warner Bros. to help with an upcoming film, THE VISITING, starring Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig (he'll be the new James Bond, the one with blond hair). Part of the action in the movie, an homage to "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" from the 1950's, takes place in the screen version of the Czech Embassy and involves characters playing the Czech Ambassador and his wife. Props were needed to make the set look like it had connection to the Czech Lands, and books and family pictures from AFoCR President Michael Rokos are being used in the film. Rokos will also have a role in the movie which will either be on the cutting room floor, or will show him at the banquet table in the Embassy with Kidman, Craig and the other major stars. The Director of the film, Oliver Hirshbiegel, expressed great respect for the Czech people, including the Czech contributions to film over the years in conversations with Rokos during the shooting. AFoCR is committed to working in all aspects of Czech life, including cultural activities.

AFoCR and West Bohemia

An article in the newspapers in Plzeň, Czech Republic reported in late September that Czech believers in the Methodist Church along with representatives of Mt. Olivet Methodist Church in Arlington, Virginia and with representatives of the **American Friends of the Czech Republic** planted a tree symbolizing cooperation among nations on the grounds of St. Luke's Church in Karlovy Vary. St. Luke's is over 100 years old, was originally an Anglican Church and is now home to a Methodist Congregation. Needless to say, the events of the last half of the 20th century allowed for the church building to fall into disrepair and much work is needed to restore the church to its former glory and usefulness.

Past AFoCR President Milton Cerny, a member of Mt. Olivet, took part in the tree planting which featured the planting of a honey locust tree, a tree native to North America. The news reports and pictures in West Bohemia prominently showed Cerny wearing his AFoCR pin and identified his close ties with our organization. AFoCR contributed funds to the project, and is but another example of how we are working in all areas on behalf of the people of the Czech Republic and the US.

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