



# AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Spring, 2009

NEWSLETTER

Volume XV, Number 1

## President Obama Visits Prague for EU Meetings



*AFP/Getty Images*  
*President Obama Speaking Before Crowd at Prague Castle*



*AP Photo/Michal Dolezal*  
*President Obama Meeting with Former Czech President Havel*

President Barack Obama, accompanied by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, participated in the EU summit in Prague on April 5, 2009. The President addressed an enthusiastic crowd of more than 20,000 people in the historic square at the gates of Prague Castle. Acknowledging the nearby monument to Czech Liberator/President Tomáš G. Masaryk, the President recalled that in 1918 Masaryk spoke at a rally of over 100,000 people in Chicago. The President delighted the crowd when he declared,



*AP Photo/Anja Niedringhaus*  
*President Obama Welcomed Upon his Arrival in Prague by Czech President Vaclav Klaus*

“I don't think I can match Masaryk's record, but I'm honored to follow his footsteps from Chicago to Prague.”

The President emphasized the strong ties between the U.S. and the Czech Republic including support for NATO. He acknowledged the need for a "new international effort" to stop nuclear proliferation, particularly singling out the weapons programs of North Korea and Iran. President Obama also expressed his support for the proposed anti-Iranian missile defense shield that will be positioned in both Poland and the Czech Republic, saying "As long as the threat from Iran persists, we intend to go forward with a missile defense system that is cost-effective and proven." He then added, "In a strange turn of history, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up," referring to the possibility of terrorists acquiring a nuclear weapon.

President Obama closed by saying, "Human destiny will be what we make of it. Here, in Prague, let us honor our past by reaching for a better future. Let us bridge our divisions, build upon our hopes, and accept our responsibility to leave this world more prosperous and more peaceful than we found it."

## Wilson Monument Project Achieves Key Milestone

### Winning Sculptor Team Selected

AFoCR's Woodrow Wilson Monument project reached a major milestone in February. A team of three Czech sculptors was chosen to recreate the statue of Wilson that will be the centerpiece of the monument. In a meeting of AFoCR's Sculptor Selection Committee held in Prague on February 24, 2009, the team of Michal Blažek, Václav Frýdecký, and Daniel Talavera emerged as the preferred choice to receive the commission for the statue originally sculpted by Albín Polášek in 1928.

*See WILSON MONUMENT, page 3*

## Chicago's Mayor Daley to Receive AFoCR Civil Society Vision Award

AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek announced that the 2009 Civil Society Vision Award will be presented to Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago. A Gala Award dinner is planned for November, 2009 to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution and to honor the Mayor. Funds raised will go to the Woodrow Wilson Monument Project. Details on the Gala event will be announced soon.

## Message from AFoCR President Tom Dine



Dear American Friends of the Czech Republic,

This is my first message as the newly elected president of the American Friends of the Czech Republic. I have known first-hand AFoCR as an American organization since I administered President Clinton's foreign economic assistance programs for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the Czech Republic and the former Soviet Union from 1993 to 1997. At the time, the Czech Republic had recently asserted its freedom from the 41-year-old Communist chokehold and was beginning its march back to democracy and market economics. I continued my association with AFoCR during my eight and a half year presidency of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, with its international broadcasting headquarters in Prague, where my wife and I lived. Serving in a leadership position of AFoCR now is an honor and privilege; today's organizational mission of championing a consistently close and strong bilateral relationship between the USA and the democratic Czech Republic is more necessary today than ever before.

Just 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the success of the Velvet Revolution, new forces, many dangerous, have been unleashed in international affairs. Political, security, and economic stakes for the two countries have become much higher. AFoCR, an independent, non-partisan, and non-profit American initiative, is a clear and relevant voice among America's citizenry to enhance the bilateral relationship, which is why I am so committed to strengthening our organization.

The good news is that the U.S.-Czech relationship is sound. There are a variety of reasons why this is true, and AFoCR plays a significant role in strengthening these reasons.

First, the two countries are dedicated democracies where the people are sovereign. In these democracies, there is an interwoven partnership between our two populations and this partnership is at the core of the Prague-Washington governmental connection. We share core values of liberty and equality, of political pluralism, civil society, freedoms of the secret ballot, speech, assembly, media, religious beliefs, of economic justice and free markets, and of the all-important rule of law. As the membership of AFoCR demonstrates, many American citizens care about and take pride in their Czech heritage. Czechs and Americans yesterday and today have lived and are living and working together, sharing the same destiny. A major reason for AFoCR is to enliven and enhance that common destiny.

Second, the Czech Republic is a NATO ally of the United States. I vividly remember the three days that President George W. Bush visited Prague in November 2002 to participate in the NATO enlargement summit, whereby the western allies further expanded the alliance after having admitted the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland as equal members in 1999. The President gave a formal address to a Radio Free Europe-sponsored session the day before the official signing ceremony. I can personally attest to how excited and proud he was to be in the historic city and welcome the new members into the world's most powerful political/military alliance.

Added to the multinational alliance is the bilateral military partnership between our two countries, such as mutual arms production and purchases, training programs, participation in NATO's Afghanistan campaign against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, and the controversial missile defense system program. It is on this latter topic that I write openly; our

individual voices need to be heard. There are current conversations in Washington, Brussels, Moscow, Warsaw, and Prague to halt deployment of a new American missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic if Russia agreed to help the U.S. curb Iran's nuclear program. For more than a year, facing significant domestic opposition, both the Czech Republic and Poland have agreed in principle to host the combined advanced radar and missile interceptors. However, the two parliaments have not ratified the agreement. It is my view that after the end of Communism, the last development we need to see is Russia dictating what constitutes "security" for Central and Eastern European countries. The hinges of 20th century history are screeching.

Third, the Czech Republic is an active member of the European Union, and currently occupies that potent economic alliance's presidency. The U.S. government actively supported the ascension of the Czechs to this important position, despite opposition to this opportunity from a few old-time American allies. President Barack Obama's recent participation in the EU summit in Prague on April 5, 2009, emphasized this support and the continuity of the Washington and Prague close partnership. When the Czechs hand over the EU gavel to the Swedes on July 1st, friends of the Czech Republic will be able to say, "A job very well done."

A fourth reason is economic engagement among the two private sectors in trade and investment, as well as joint research and development projects in a variety of fields, including renewable energy and energy efficiency. This area needs much expansion. So far, the strength of the Czech economy is showing itself amidst the downturn not only in Europe but around the world.

The relationship of the United States and the Czech Republic is close and strong, but needs to be even closer and stronger over the next two-score years. AFoCR can help in this noble endeavor -- by growing larger in terms of membership and grassroots activities, and expressions to our country's local and national leadership of the critical role that a small but solid country in Central Europe can play in advancing the interests of the United States.

Cordially,

Thomas A. Dine  
President



**EU Open House and Europe Week**

On May 9, 2009, the 27 Embassies of the European Union (EU) and the European Commission (EC) Delegation to the U.S. will open their doors to the Washington public for a day of celebration of the diversity of the EU society. Each Embassy will offer activities and programs highlighting its unique culture, commerce, cuisine, and tourism along with entertainment for the entire family.

The EU open House is followed by Europe Week, a seven day celebration of European culture from May 9-May 16. The public will be treated to concerts, exhibitions and performances by all the Embassies of Europe. The annual EU Open House, the largest celebration of the European Union in the world, is seeking volunteers to help host the approximately 60,000 expected visitors. To volunteer at the Embassy of the Czech Republic or any other EU chancery, please contact Nora Jurkovicova at (202) 274-9114 or email Nora at [nora\\_jurkovicova@mzv.cz](mailto:nora_jurkovicova@mzv.cz).

Please visit [www.europe-in-dc.com](http://www.europe-in-dc.com) for a complete listing of events.

**WILSON MONUMENT PROJECT, from Page 1**

The selection was the culmination of a nine-month competitive process that began last June when AFoCR through the Czech media requested proposals from sculptors. The Selection Committee members were American architect Paul W. Beckmann for the Albin Polášek Foundation, architect Mikuláš Hulec for AFoCR, Karel Holub for the Capital City of Prague, architect Jaromíra Eismannová for the Metropolitan District of Prague 1, Czech sculptor Ivan Kalvoda, and Dr. Jan Koblasa, a Czech-born sculptor who lives in Germany. Czech sculptor Milan Vácha substituted for Dr. Koblasa at the February meeting. The Committee's deliberations were moderated by Robert Doubek, who is leading the Wilson project for AFoCR.

The creation of the statue, including the process of bronze casting, will take 18 months. Concurrently, the designs for the monument's base and pedestal and the Walk of Freedom will be developed by AFoCR's architects Mikuláš Hulec and Daniel Špička. Prague 1 Mayor Petr Hejma in December approved AFoCR's preferred site for the monument, in the park facing the center of the train station.

The Committee reviewed and discussed three 1:3 scale models of the statue, which were submitted by the finalists in the selection process. The Committee also interviewed the artists, who described their methods, discussed the challenges they faced in developing their models, and answered questions. The other two finalists were: Jiří Kašpar (individual) and Zdeněk Hošek and Kryštof Hošek (team).

In summarizing the deliberations leading to its choice of the Blažek team, the Committee stated: "...the overall composition and figure frame was the most successful. It was clear to the Committee that the artist team took great care in not only understanding the shape of the original statue but also exploring Albin Polášek's original ideas to work with the same set of ideas while re-creating his work. This personal commitment and passion for the ideas which informed the original statue was an item of particular encouragement for the Committee."

Mr. Beckmann noted, "The message captured by the winning model spoke to us. The authors of this model successfully recreated the extraordinary strength that we sense in photos of Albin Polášek's original monument."

The multi-generational winning team possesses extensive academic training and experience in sculpture. Václav Frýdecký, age 77, has created monumental statues in bronze since the 1960's. Michal Blažek, born 1955, has done monumental sculpture for over 30 years. He reconstructed the statue group on the exterior balcony of the Czech National Theater as well as monumental statues at Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Daniel Talavera, born 1969, has created numerous monumental sculptures which adorn public parks and other settings.

## Vondra Addresses Washington Conference on EU Presidency



*Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra speaking at the Center for Transatlantic Relations on 3/23/09*

Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra hosted a discussion entitled "The Czech EU Presidency at the Midterm: Transatlantic Relations before the U.S.-EU Summit in Prague" on March 23, 2009 at the Center for Transatlantic Relations in Washington, DC. AFoCR President Tom Dine and Director Phil Kasik attended the discussion.

In early April, President Obama met for the first time with the 27 heads of government of the European Union in Prague. There, he discussed the new agenda for U.S.-EU relations. Deputy Prime Minister Vondra offered his perspective on the European Summit as he outlined the Czech EU Presidential priorities and launched a new plan on forging a strategic U.S.-EU partnership.

## Bohemian National Hall in New York Hosts Annual Beseda Ball



*Left to right: AFoCR Director/BBLA President Joseph Balaz gives opening remarks at the Beseda Ball; Joseph Balaz with Czech President Václav Klaus and Ambassador Petr Kolár*

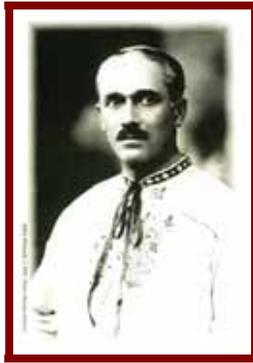
On March 6, 2009, the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (BBLA) held its annual black tie Beseda Ball for the first time at the newly renovated Bohemian National Hall in Manhattan. Joining those representing the Czech government was the Minister of Agriculture Petr Gandalovic, who together with the late Jan Hird Pokorny, played a pivotal role in the transfer of the building from BBLA under the auspices of the Czech Republic over 10 years ago. Ambassador Petr Kolár's wife Jaraslova Kolár accompanied by Daniel Novy from the Czech Embassy in Washington attended the ball along with Ambassador to the UN Martin Palous and his wife Pavla. Other notable guests included Consul General Eliska Zigova and her staff and several members of the Czech parliament.

Two days following the event, Ambassador Petr Kolár accompanied by Czech President Václav Klaus made a brief visit to see the impressive renovations in person. Still to come is the final renovation to be made to a small area on the ground floor which is designated for a cafe featuring Czech cuisine.

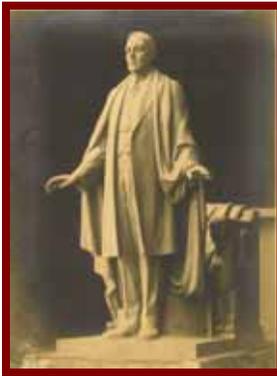
# Woodrow Wilson Monument History in Photos



*Sculptor Albin Polasek finishing statue in 1928*



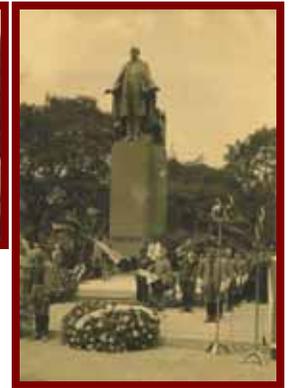
*Albin Polasek*



*Original Monument*



*Dedication of Monument at Wilson Train Station, Prague, July 4, 1928*



*Wilson Monument facing Wilson Station, 1928 to 1941*



*Selected Sculptor Team: Michal Blazek, Václav Frydecky, and Daniel Talavera*



*AFoCR Executive Vice President Bill Cabaniss and Catherine Cabaniss with Paul Beckmann and Robert Doubek at future site of Monument*



*Robert Doubek with study of head prepared by selected team*



*Selected Model*



*Destruction of Monument, December 1941*



*Selection Committee member Paul Beckmann, representing the Albin Polasek Foundation*



*AFoCR Sculptor Selection Committee examining 1:3 models, February 2009*



*AFoCR Wilson Monument Project Leader Robert Doubek with original plaster mold of head and shoulders, found in January 2008*



*Original plaster molds of statue, destroyed in 1977*

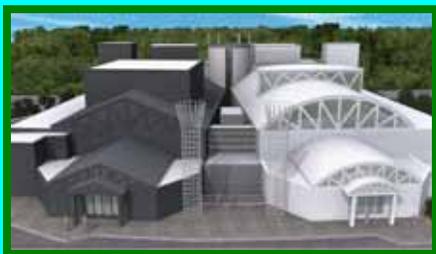
## Winton Story Comes to Chicago

Peter A. Rafaeli, Honorary Consul General of the Czech Republic in Philadelphia, past President and Executive Board member of AFoCR, and long-time advocate of Nicholas Winton will be the keynote speaker at a special reception entitled "Homage to a Great European: Sir Nicholas Winton" scheduled for Thursday, May 21, 2009. The program will be held at the newly constructed Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center (IHMEC) in Skokie.

At the event, there will be a private screening of Matej Mináč's film, "The Power of Good" followed by a cocktail reception. Although the event is free of charge, seating is limited to 250. Joining AFoCR as co-sponsors of the event are the IHMEC, the Czech and the UK Consulate Generals in Chicago, the Chicago Chapter of the American Jewish Committee, and the Prague Committee of the Chicago Sister Cities International Program.

This event is particularly propitious as it is scheduled to occur in the first full month of operation of the IHMEC. The dedication of the Center is scheduled for April 19, 2009, and will attract an "all-star ensemble" to be announced. This 65,000 square foot facility is a state of the art museum offering permanent and travelling exhibits, interactive, intergenerational and diverse in application to teach the lessons of the Holocaust and promote understanding and tolerance among all people.

On this topic, on January 29, 2009, Peter Rafaeli also spoke at the annual Holocaust remembrance co-sponsored by the Czech Embassy and held at the residence of the British Deputy Head of Mission, Dominick Chilcott, in Washington, DC. Peter discussed Sir Nicholas Winton's heroic efforts that resulted in saving nearly 700 Czech children from certain death at the outset of WWII. He also noted the availability of the book *Lottery of Life*, published by AFoCR, that chronicles Winton's extraordinary achievement. Written by Matej Mináč and translated by Rafaeli, copies of the book are available from AFoCR at no cost to educational institutions. Rafaeli noted that the book donation project has accelerated in pace recently, having shipped a total of 6000 books to date all over the United States, Canada and some to Europe. Educators may order books by emailing to [Philadelphia@honorary.mzv.cz](mailto:Philadelphia@honorary.mzv.cz).



**Holocaust Museum & Education Center (IHMEC) in Skokie**  
(For more information: visit [www.iholocaustmuseum.org](http://www.iholocaustmuseum.org))

## NCSML Plans Next Step in Recovery

### Additional Site Acquired for Future Exhibits



**Historic Kosek Building**

The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa is making steady progress in its recovery from a devastating flood that occurred in June 2008. In October, the NCSML board and staff held a retreat to step back from the immediacy of disaster response to do some long term planning. As a result, the team reaffirmed a commitment to their national mission and to the Czech neighborhood where they reside, known as Czech Village. Though it was severely impacted by the Flood of 2008, Czech Village stands as an authentic expression of the Czech and Slovak immigrant story. "We have a duty to protect the community that gives us our context, before it is forever lost," said NCSML President and CEO Gail Naughton. "In doing so, we believe we are helping to preserve our national treasure that will help to tell the story of the Czech and Slovak immigrant experience."

In November, the NCSML Board of Directors approved a mid-term plan that will establish a visitor experience to remain in place as the NCSML expands and rebuilds the national and international exhibition program and library. To that end, the museum acquired the historic Kosek building in Czech Village, which will house an exhibition and offices.

The exhibition, titled *Rising Above: The Story of a People and the Flood*, reveals the triumphs, tragedies, challenges and recovery of a people as they and their community rise above adversity. The exhibit will employ all of the senses as it unveils the history of Czechs in Cedar Rapids and how the flood affected the people and their neighborhoods. "We will incorporate Czech Village into the visitor experience as an authentic 20<sup>th</sup>-century ethnic commercial district once common to many Czech and Slovak neighborhoods across the country, but hard to find intact today," said Naughton. "We intend to help revitalize and spur the redevelopment of the area as a visitor destination." The building project and exhibition, a permanent addition to the museum's campus are planned to open in late 2009. For more information, visit [www.NCSML.org](http://www.NCSML.org).

### AFoCR Director George Drost is Guest Speaker for Wisconsin Czechs

AFoCR Director George T. Drost is the guest speaker at the annual scholarship banquet of the Wisconsin Czechs, a 400 member organization. The banquet is scheduled for May 17, 2009, at 1:00 p.m. in Krok, Wisconsin, located just east of the town of Pilsen. Mr. Drost will speak about both the restoration of the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague and the Sir Nicholas Winton project. For more information, contact Joel Blahník at 920-868-3100, or write him at 9171 Spring Road, Fish Creek, Wisconsin 54212-9320.

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