NCSML Is Back
Grand Reopening in Cedar Rapids

Under a shining sun and with resounding applause from the assembled guests from across the Midwest and around the country, the new National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library was formally rededicated. Museum President and CEO Gail Naughton, with help from the Museum’s Board of Directors and assembled dignitaries, cut the ribbon to formally open the Museum for visitors. As she heralded the triumphal reopening, Ms. Naughton declared to the appreciative crowd of supporters, “We are back!”

The grand reopening capped four years of work to plan, design, and rebuild an expanded and improved facility to replace the one that was struck by the terrible flood of 2008. The new facility, built on higher ground across the street from its original location, includes the original museum building, which was moved intact to the new site. With a monumental engineering effort, the building was not only moved across a street, but was raised 11 feet to protect it from any future floods.

Many local and national dignitaries were on hand to celebrate the long-awaited reopening. Participating in the ceremony were Iowa’s U.S. Senators Charles Grassley and Tom Harkin and senators from the Czech Republic, as well as the Czech Ambassador to Washington, Petr Gandalovič.

In his remarks, Senator Harkin described the new Museum as “unsinkable”. In noting the outpouring of help after the flood and the support in rebuilding, he affirmed: “In June of 2008, we saw Mother Nature at her very worst. But in the weeks and months that followed, we saw human nature at its very best.” Senator Grassley called the Museum “one of Iowa’s great cultural treasures.” Czech Senator Tomáš Grulich recalled the dedication in 1995, when U.S President Bill Clinton, Czech President Václav Havel, and Slovak President Michal Kováč all participated.

ASPEN PRAGUE OPENS
New Aspen Institute Affiliate to Focus on Central European Issues

The Central European affiliate of the prestigious U.S. educational and policy studies organization, Aspen Institute, was inaugurated in Prague on July 19. Among the dignitaries in attendance was former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Born in Prague, she delivered a speech entitled "Crisis as an Opportunity," as an honorary guest at the inaugural conference. The conference was attended by the foreign ministers of Great Britain, Poland, and Russia, i.e. Malcolm Rifkind, Daniel Rotfeld, and Andrei Kozyrev, as well as by Michael Žantovský, who is both the Czech ambassador to Great Britain and the President of the Aspen Prague Board of Directors.

Ambassador Žantovský, former Czech Ambassador to the United States, stated that "The aim of the Institute is to create an independent impartial organization that would prepare a space and atmosphere for discussion on the most important political, social, and other questions of the current society."

Radek Špicar, Director of Aspen Prague, opened the inaugural conference, declaring that the new affiliate intends to educate top experts in business, politics, science, culture, and the NGO sector, and in so doing support the development of promising people from

Contributions Pour In for American Tribute to Václav Havel

Over 250 contributions have been received for the plaque honoring the late Czech President Václav Havel. Later this year, the plaque will be dedicated on the Walk of Freedom at the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague, as a tribute from the American Czech and Slovak communities.

The plaque will be of the largest size on the Walk, i.e. 14” by 28”, and be located in the most prominent position, directly adjacent to

Malek Receives Churchill Award

AFOCR Chairman Fred Malek received the Churchill Centre’s prestigious 2012 Leadership Award at a gala ceremony in Washington in April.
Political realism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can be harsh and less than hopeful. Historical memory in this part of the world is not a green garden. In fact, over the past two years, another bare patch of realism in the form of economic and geopolitical turbulence has returned -- the unresolved European debt crisis, a Eurozone recession, a downscaled U.S. military presence in Europe with an associated American policy shift toward Asia, regression in Hungary, Ukraine, and parts of the Balkans, and the return of despotic Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency. All of this impacts the Czech Republic and its neighbors.

The current good news is that Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and the Slovak Republic, in that order, remain on democracy's fertile course. The bad news, however, is many more countries are not, as Putinism looms large as an autocratic model over the whole political landscape. Those nearest to Prague -- Budapest, Kyiv, and Belgrade, are off-course -- on a negative anti-democratic trajectory, propelled by the drives of their current leaderships to concentrate power and to take liberties away from their citizenry.

An update concerning the status of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe is recorded in the most recent publication of Freedom House, the Washington DC-based internationally respected freedom-and-democracy organization. Nations in Transit, 2012 is an annual comprehensive comparative study of democratic development, or not, in 29 countries of the new Europe and Eurasia.

Democracy indicators analyzed and used by a cadre of Freedom House global scholars are seven: electoral process, civil society, independent media, national democratic governance, local democratic governance, independent judiciary, and extent of corruption. The best ratings are in the ones or low twos up to the sixes and sevens as the worst. Slovenia rates highest with a democratic score of 1.89; the Czech Republic scores at 2.2; Slovakia is at 2.5.

The anti-democracy trend in the region is directly and indirectly affecting the Czech Republic. For instance, the negative political conditions and direction in neighboring Hungary, once so promising, has been slipping badly the last few years, and is now at 2.86, and heading for a worse record in the coming 12 months. Close-by Ukraine received a rank of 4.82 and is also heading toward a far worse score, as well. The same goes for seven weak Balkan countries and of course Russia - with a dismal 6.18 score that matches the lowly records of the dictatorships of Central Asia.

Overall, in Central and Eastern Europe, one finds poorly rooted traditions of democratic practices, including a weak and less than independent media; the absence of an independent and honest judicial system; resilient networks of corruption and clientalism, including an overlap between business and political interests; low levels of public trust and engagement, indeed unfree and unfair elections; and shaky and shaky economic conditions. All of these ensure the lack of indelible democratic reforms and steady improvements.

The attitude and actions of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary now provide a documented case in point (as I wrote in my previous Presidential Message). Hungary has suffered decline in all of Freedom House's seven categories. His anti-democratic consolidation of power has been helped by a weak opposition, his own illiberal ruling party, and a super majority in the Parliament. Over the last several months, Orbán has consistently and angrily lashed out at the EU and its member governments, as well as the United States.

Nearby Ukraine also faces worsening governance and a collapsing economy. This is troubling to the Czech Republic, a trading partner, and to NATO and the EU. At one time, these alliances cultivated Ukraine to prepare itself to join these two multinational pro-Western groupings.

An erstwhile democratic hopeful for many years, Ukraine holds a pivotal geographic and political position between the EU and Russia. In Freedom House's latest ratings, however, the country shows -- by a sharp, multiyear decline in five of seven indicators -- that it is unprepared and unwilling to change and move toward a functioning democratic society. President Viktor Yanukovych, a questionable, pro-Russian character from the Russian-speaking east, and his government are undertaking a broad assault on institutional accountability and transparency. Yanukovych has targeted the country's already non-autonomous judiciary. The courts are increasingly becoming an instrument for attacking, even jailing, political opponents, such as former Prime Minister and Presidential candidate Yulia Tymoshenko. Despite outside protests claiming injustice, she remains behind bars. Yanukovych's forces are imposing their will on the country's academics and news media as well.

In the Balkans, critical reform is stalled in each country as economic conditions and harsh austerity measures pose serious challenges to democratic development.

I continue to call attention to these anti-democratic situations because they impose a clear and present danger to the Czech Republic's 22-year old democratic governance, independent judiciary and rule of law, efforts to stem its political corruption and cronyism, open media, and individual liberties. The burden falls on Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and the Slovak Republic to continue to create their own progressive futures. In that regard, the harshness of the past and anti-democratic present must be kept away from the growing gardens of democratic values, institutions, and processes.
NCSML is Back (from P.1.)

The grand reopening day began with a parade through the Czech Village with many marchers in traditional kroj dress. The ceremony began with the raising of the American, Czech, and Slovak flags followed by national anthems. After the ribbon cutting, there were festive food offerings, music, and traditional Czech folk dancing. In celebrating the reopening, the Museum debuted a special exhibit of over 200 works of Czech artist Alphonse Mucha, including a well-attended and informative lecture by his grandson John Mucha.

Aspen Prague Opens (from P.1.)

Central Europe. The Prague affiliate will also hold behind-closed-door seminars at which experts from various fields will discuss current social and political themes. The Institute also plans to organize conferences for the broad public, invite interesting personalities to Prague, and issue the quarterly Aspen Review.

Aspen Prague has been under development for over a year, with AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek playing a principal role and serving on the international board. Aspen Institute was founded as an international non-profit organization in 1950. It focuses on the education of leading personalities and the development of dialogue on important social and political issues. It is based in Washington with affiliates in many countries of the world.

Tribute to Havel (from P.1.)

the pedestal. The names and cities of all contributors will appear in a special Tribute Book that will be presented to the Havel family and to the Czech and Slovak Ambassadors. The names and cities will also appear on the AFoCR web site and in the AFoCR Newsletter.

To donate online with a credit card, contributors can use AFoCR’s secure Click & Pledge web site at: http://www.afocr.org/help-us.html, and specify the “Havel Tribute Fund.”

Only Two Plaques Remain on Walk of Freedom

As of press time, only two open plaques remain on the Walk of Freedom, both at the $2,500 level. Since the dedication of the Woodrow Wilson Monument last October, 24 more individuals and organizations have made contributions that will be recognized with plaques. AFoCR plans to install all the new plaques this year, culminating with a ceremony to dedicate the tribute to Václav Havel. To arrange for one of the last plaques, donors can contact Robert Doubek at doubtek98@aol.com.

Chicago was buzzing with the arrival of NATO leaders and with events during the two day NATO Summit held on May 20 and 21 and hosted by President Barack Obama. Preparations to stage the Summit began last year and were very intense during the four weeks leading up to it. From the Czech Republic, President Václav Klaus, Prime Minister Petr Nečas, Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg, and Minister of Defense Alexandr Vondra attended.

It was the “who’s who” of the Czech political world, and it was topped off by “Madame Secretary” Madeleine Albright, most recently a Presidential Medal of Freedom Awardee and an official host of the NATO Summit Committee, and by Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič.

In addition to those from NATO countries, more than 50 world leaders converged on Chicago. The Summit’s main objective was to set dates for the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Another significant issue involved the refusal of Pakistan to provide transit routes to supply NATO troops stationed in Afghanistan.

Chicagoans with Czech roots extended their hospitality by holding a “meet and greet” at Klas Restaurant in Cicero for President Klaus, Prime Minister Nečas, Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, Defense Minister Vondra, and Ambassador Gandalovič. Secretary Albright also attended.

On Sunday, May 20, a dinner event honoring Prime Minister Nečas at the Woman’s Athletic Club of Chicago was co-hosted by AFoCR Director Kristyna Driehaus and spouse John Pellouchoud, AFoCR Director George T. Drost and spouse Beth, and Chairman of Chicago Prague Sister Cities International Duke Dellin and spouse Cate. Also representing the Czech Republic during the evening were Ambassador Gandalovič and Ambassador Dana Huňátová, Consul General of the Czech Republic in Chicago.

U.S. Senator Tom Harkin, AFoCR Vice President Phil Kasik, and AFoCR President Tom Dine

AFoCR Vice President Phil Kasik Congratulates AFoCR Director and NCSML President Gail Naughton

Peter Zelenak, Charge d’Affaires a.i., Embassy of the Slovak Republic; Gail Naughton, NCSML President and CEO; Petr Gandalovič, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the United States; and U.S. Senator Tom Harkin

Photo by Barbara Sturner FEMA

Grand Interior of the NCSML

Beautiful New 50,000 Square Foot Building– the NCSML on its Grand Opening, July 14, 2012

Parade and Celebrations in Traditional Czech Costumes
SOKOL Ceremony at Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague
July 4th, 2012
Sokols Gather in Prague for Historic Slet

American and Czech Sokols gathered in Prague for their 2012 Slet. At Prague’s SAZKA stadium, thousands of SOKOL athletes and gymnasts participated in the 14th all-Sokol event. In addition to the slet, the organization celebrated the 150th anniversary of Czech Sokol. The highlight of the week-long events was a star-spangled 4th of July Ceremony at the Woodrow Wilson Monument. Special guest speakers included Minister of Defense Alexandr Vondra, U.S. Ambassador Norman Eisen, and Prague 1 Mayor Oldrich Lomecky. Floral tributes were laid, followed by a reception at the AutoClub CZ. See page 5 for photos.

Czech Embassy in Damascus to Provide Consular Services for USA

Prague Aug 1 (CTK)

The Czech embassy in Damascus will be providing consular services for the USA in Syria. Washington has closed down its mission in Damascus over unrest in the country. It asked the Czech Republic to represent it in Damascus. Prague has complied with the request, the ministry said.

The USA is another state, after Slovakia, to use the Czech diplomatic presence in Damascus. Washington withdrew its diplomats from the Syrian capital in February already. Then the U.S. interests in Syria were represented by Poland, which, however, closed its own embassy down for security reasons July 27.

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski gave the "dramatic deterioration" of the Syrian conflict as the reason for the closure. “The Czech Republic has accepted an official request from the United States of America regarding a proposal that the Czech Republic become the United States' Protecting Power in Syria. The circumstances of the cooperation will depend on continuous evaluation of the security situation from the Czech side, including leaving Syria for the security reasons,” the Czech ministry writes on its web site. Currently the negotiations concerning the conditions are underway, it adds.

Visit to Czech Embassy in Cuba

On April 26, 2012, AFoCR Director George Drost visited the Czech Embassy in Havana, Cuba. Mr. Drost was in Cuba in his role as President of WorldChicago (WC), 501(c) non-profit organization that promotes citizen-to-citizen diplomacy. Accompanying Mr. Drost were WC Executive Director Peggy Parfenoff and Director Katie Merrill. At the embassy they were graciously received by Ambassador Jaroslav Zajic, Chargé d’affaires a.i. to the Republic of Cuba.

The Czech Republic maintains an active embassy in Cuba, although Cuban/Czech relations have been strained since the Velvet Revolution due to the strong Czech/U.S. relationship and Czech advocacy for human rights. Ambassador Zajic had been posted only seven weeks earlier and was making rounds to all of the diplomatic delegations in Havana. He did graduate studies in San Diego, California, and his prior duty posts have been in Spanish-speaking countries. He was pleased to receive friends from Chicago, and Mr. Drost extended greetings on behalf of the AFoCR. One topic of interest regarding Chicago was the preparations for the NATO summit.

WW II Experience Relived

The Embassy of the Czech Republic hosted a special event reliving the first hand experience of two decorated WW II combat veterans as it celebrated Czech Armed Forces Day. Col. Tom Gibian (ret) and Col. Frank Backer (ret) joined forces to deliver an exciting view of WW II combat. Each related their experience escaping from occupied Czechoslovakia, choosing to fight for their country with Allied forces. Col. Gibian related his experience training to become an RAF combat pilot, and then flying over 77 sorties through the end of the war, including multiple sorties over the beaches of Normandy during the D-Day invasions. Col. Backer fought with Czech Army ground forces fighting in southern France.

Czech Soldier Heroically Saves U.S. Soldier in Afghanistan

Through his heroic action, a Czech Army soldier saved the life of a U.S. soldier. The incident took place in late 2011 at a forward base in eastern Afghanistan. A route clearance patrol was attacked with several roadside bombs, wounding a U.S. soldier who was on foot. The soldier lost both legs and a hand. During the attack, Czech Army Staff Sergeant Michal Novotný, a reconnaissance squad leader and combat medic, rescued the gravely wounded American. Sgt. Novotný rushed in without security and applied tourniquets, despite the possibility that more bombs could detonate, saving the soldier’s life. The soldier is now receiving treatment in the United States. In recognition of his brave action, Sgt. Novotný was awarded the U.S. Bronze Star Medal for Bravery. The award was presented by the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, during a recent visit to the forward base.

AFoCR President Tom Dine interviews Madeleine Albright about her new book Prague Winter at the Bohemian National Hall in New York City flanked by Joseph Balaz, BBLA President and AFoCR Director

AFoCR Director Emeritus Tom Gibian Speaking at the Czech Embassy

Czech Army Staff Sgt. Michal Novotný with the Bronze Star for Bravery


Bohemian National Hall in New York City flanked by Joseph Balaz, BBLA President and AFoCR Director
New York's Events
Honor Havel

New Yorkers gathered in May to celebrate the life of Václav Havel. The event remembered and honored the man who led his country in its return to democracy and became a major inspiration for countless people in their search for human rights, justice, and freedom. The event announced the establishment of the Václav Havel Library (VHL) in Prague - the only presidential library in Europe.

Over 200 people attended the reception at the Lincoln Center Theater, including Americans with long standing ties to Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, NGO leaders, and individuals who have lived and worked in the country. Eleven UN Ambassadors were present. Among the dignitaries who attended and spoke were former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Ivan Havel - brother of the late president, Ambassador Martin Palouš, and Ambassador Michael Žantovský, who is currently Czech Ambassador to London and the VHL spokesperson.

American singer Suzanne Vega, a close friend of President Havel, performed a piece chosen especially for the event. The event was moderated by the famous Czech actress Zuzana Stivínová and Wendy Luers, President of the Foundation for a Civil Society and an AFoCR Advisor.

The following day, meetings were held to inaugurate the Library’s Foundation Board and Advisory Board. In addition to serving as a director, former AFoCR President Milton Cerny, as the attorney for the Foundation, is assisting with its incorporation in the U.S. Other directors include Ambassador Craig Stapleton as Chair, Wendy Luers as Vice Chair, Count Riprand Arco, Geoffrey Hougou, Ambassador John Shattuck, and Ambassador William Cabaniss.

Serving on the Advisory Board will be: Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy; Secretary Albright, Fred Malek, AFoCR Chairman; Tom Dine, AFoCR President; Joseph Balaz, President of the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association, which will provide administrative support and office space in NY; Lise Stone, former adviser to President Havel; Vartan Gregorian, President, The Carnegie Corporation; Ambassador William Luers, Adjunct Professor, Columbia University; and Countess Maria Beatrice Arco, Vice Chair, American Asset Corporation.  

Exhibition Opening at Czech Embassy:
Assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, and Screening of Film: Lidice

On May 31, the Embassy of the Czech Republic hosted an exhibit on the 1942 assassination of the infamous Reinhard Heydrich, the German “Reichsprotektor” of Bohemia and Moravia. The exhibit commemorated the 70th anniversary of the assassination and the resulting reprisal massacre and destruction of the village of Lidice.

Czech Deputy Chief of Mission Jaroslav Zajiček began with a discussion of the significance of these events in Czech history. Also present to speak to guests and discuss the exhibit were members of the Czech Parliament David Vodrážka, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Jan Bauer, Chairman of the Committee for European Affairs.

Consisting of 20 large posters depicting events leading up to the assassination, the event itself, and its aftermath, the exhibit was prepared by the Military History Institute in Prague. The posters also featured copies of historical photos and important documents from that time. The exhibit included a discussion of Heydrich’s role in chairing the January 1942 Wannsee Conference in Berlin, at which the final plans for the Holocaust were developed. The attack on Heydrich was carried out by Czechoslovak parachutists coming from London, who later committed suicide rather than letting themselves be captured. The exhibit concluded with a review of the assassination’s larger impact on Czech history.

The display was followed by a screening of the film, “In the Shadow of Memory,” which is based on the life-story of Jerri Zbiral, whose mother and sister survived the destruction of Lidice. Ms. Zbiral then spoke of her experiences.
American Friends of The Czech Republic
4410 Massachusetts Avenue, NW #391
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Photo by Lillis Werder

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