

Newsletter

Czechs Join EU

Ceremonies in Prague and at Embassy in Washington Mark Historic Accession



In Washington the embassies of the new members held celebrations. On Monday, May 3, the EU and Irish Ambassadors joined Czech Ambassador Martin Palouš in a dignified and moving EU flag-raising ceremony at the Czech Embassy. After the Czech, US, and EU anthems were played, each ambassador presented an address at the historic occasion. Following the speeches, the Embassy military guard smartly prepared and raised the EU flag for the first time on a newly installed pole. Attendees included a delegation of Czech senators lead by Senator Josef Jarab, thirteen Czech Honorary Consuls from around the U.S. , and three AFoCR officers.



Czech Ambassador Martin Palous at Congressional Ceremony for the new EU Member States.

With Czech Senator Josef Jařab and AFoCR President Phil Kasik

On May 4, the U.S. Congress invited the ambassadors from the ten new EU member countries to a ceremony on Capitol Hill. In the presence of the Ambassadors from the EU and Ireland, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Mark Grossman, and Senate Foreign Relations Committee member Senator George Allen of Virginia both emphasized the importance of this historic expansion of the European Union and underscored U.S. support for expansion, especially the inclusion of the former Soviet bloc countries.

AFOCR to Honor President Havel

Gala Concert and Award Dinner to Celebrate 15 Years of Freedom and EU Accession



Václav Havel

AFoCR will hold its 2004 Gala Award Dinner on Thursday, June 17, at the JW Marriott Hotel in Washington . The theme for the event is Fifteen Years of Freedom, evoking the anniversary of the famed Velvet Revolution of November 1989. Along with this historic turning point, the Event celebrates the Czech Republic 's accession to the European Union and the Year of Czech Music. AFoCR will also present its highest honor, the Civil Society Vision Award.

This year's honoree will be Václav Havel, in recognition of his lifelong pursuit of democracy, freedom and human rights; his resistance against the Communist dictatorship; his key role in the Velvet Revolution; and his principled leadership as President of the free and democratic Czechoslovakia and of the Czech Republic after 1993. Former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who strongly supported the Czech Republic in its successful bid to join NATO in 1999, will present the award.

The evening will begin with a recital by the brilliant Czech virtuoso pianist Lukáš Vondráček. The concert will feature some of his best solo works and a selection of pieces by Antonín Dvořák. Czech Ambassador Martin Palouš and U.S. Ambassador to Prague William Cabaniss will serve as Honorary Co-Chairs for the event, which is being chaired by Frederic Malek. Former NBC News Correspondent John Palmer will serve as Master of Ceremonies for the evening. Debuting will be a documentary video - produced by AFoCR - which traces the events leading up to the Velvet Revolution and the fifteen years of democracy that have culminated with Czech memberships in both NATO and the European Union.



Memorial Architect Jan Hird Pokorny Receives Award in Ceremony at the Czech Embassy

Mr. Kasik noted the efforts of many individuals and companies in bringing the Masaryk Memorial to reality. Certificates of appreciation were presented by AFoCR in a ceremony at the Czech Embassy, and Ambassador Palouš personally thanked each of the honorees.

Sen. Pithart Gives Address at Georgetown



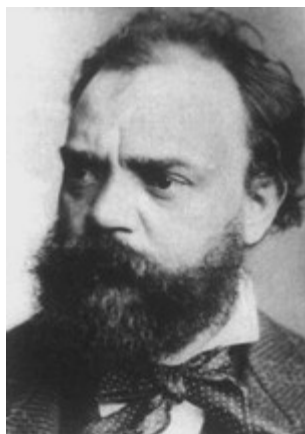
Senator Pithart and Ambassador Palouš; Walsh School of Foreign Service

Senator Petr Pithart, President of the Czech Senate, visited Washington in April. In an address delivered at the Walsh School of Foreign Affairs at Georgetown University , Senator Pithart highlighted the role and importance of central Europe in current transatlantic and European relations. He also outlined the historical context for America 's present role in this part of Europe and as well as its relations with the

European Union. Senator Pithart later met with AFoCR president Phillip Kasik and former president Milton Cerny on areas of current interest.

Note: To read the full text of the address, see the AFoCR website, www.afocr.org.

New York Celebrates Year of Czech Music



A marvelous musical event and a memorable event took place at the Isaac Stern auditorium of Carnegie Hall in New York City in March.

The Czech Philharmonic, on its 2004 tour of the United States , performed an all-Dvorák program to the delight of a most appreciative full house . Andrey Bore yko conducted and Pierre-Laurent Aimard was the piano soloist. The program included three Slavonic dances composed between 1878 and 1887 and Piano Concerto in G Minor, Op. 33 composed in 1883. The regular program concluded with Dvorák 's Symphony No. 9 "From the New World" composed by the artist in the United States during 1893. Its world premiere also took place in New York to the delight of a highly appreciative audience. The concert was followed by a reception organized at Hotel Elysee by the Consul General of the Czech Republic in New York , Aleš Pospíšil. In attendance at the concert and reception were Senator Ladislav Svoboda, Vice-Chairman of the Czech Senate, Craig Stapleton, former U.S. Ambassador to Prague , Martin Palouš, Czech Ambassador to Washington, and Peter A. Rafaeli, AFoCR Treasurer/Consul General of the Czech Republic in Philadelphia .

Message from the President

Something important happened this month. In its simplest terms, many more Europeans now can call themselves citizens of the EU. It is a long-awaited and exciting development, and worthy of the celebrations that occurred in Europe and in Washington . I watched several with great awe. The accession to the EU of ten new members will change lives in the new member states in ways that are known and unknown, fair and possibly unfair. It is clear that there is a new situation, and the Czechs will begin to feel some changes almost immediately. Some changes will take months to complete; some may take years to fully play out.

What will be even more interesting to see, will be how the new members affect the European Commission itself. Most of the new members have traveled hard roads under the yoke of totalitarian regimes. Some come with economies still suffering from years of neglect. Their experiences lead to a justifiable skepticism of local solutions imposed from outside. The EU will be stronger as these new voices begin to be heard. These new members most assuredly will not stand by while others make decisions for them.

Which leads to the vexing question of how to deal with the small country, large country representation issue. That problem also troubled the framers of our constitution and almost broke the back of the fledgling republic before it got started. It is not likely that the present framers of the EU will look fondly to the US for ideas, but as objective history, would it not be wise to get past this resistance, and see if there are lessons to be learned from how one of the oldest republics dealt with the challenge of creating a durable union of disparate states?



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