Events Announced for November Celebration of Freedom Highlight to be Ceremony Placing Havel Bust in Capitol

A FoCR Chairman Fred Malek and Czech Ambassador to the United States Petr Gandalovič have announced the final plans for the Washington celebrations marking 25 years of freedom for the Czech people. The high point will be the unveiling of a bust of the late Czech Republic President Václav Havel in the United States Capitol. The placing of the Havel bust, a project of the Václav Havel Library Foundation and AFoCR, will commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, which began on November 17, 1989. The Honorary Chairmen for the events are former U.S. Presidents George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush and William J. Clinton, all of whom knew Havel well.

The 25th Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution

November 17, 2014, will mark the 25th anniversary of the onset of the Velvet Revolution (sametová revoluce in Czech), by which the Czech and Slovak peoples liberated themselves from 41 years of communist oppression and set out to reclaim their historic roles as Western democratic nations. The word “velvet” refers to the fact that the transition of power took place without loss of life.

By November 1989, Poland already had a government led by non-communists, and Hungary had removed the barbed-wire fence along its border with Austria. The Berlin Wall had opened on November 9th, so the Czechs and Slovaks were already late to the party. In fact, during September and October, up to 8,000 East Germans had sought refuge at the West German Embassy in Prague.

The events in Prague were launched by a group of students who received permission from the communist government to commemorate International Students’ Day, held annually on November 17. The day, celebrated throughout Europe, originally commemorated the Nazi German closing of Czech universities in 1939 and the subsequent deportation of 1,200 students to concentration camps. (continued on page 3)
Letter from AFoCR President
Tom Dine

Czech Response to Russian Aggression

In the first half of 2014, the world witnessed Russia's invasion of Ukraine, its seizure and annexation of Crimea, and its fomenting of separatist activity in eastern and southern Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, as well as the Baltic and Visegrad countries. In the second half of 2014, the question before the Central European state entities, including the Czech Republic, is whether the targeted governments can stand up for themselves against further Kremlin aggression.

Only those prepared, with sufficiently strong national institutions and will power, have a chance. Ukraine learned the negative consequences of national corruption, a meek military, severe political disunity, energy dependency, and weak media beholden to Russian television, as well as judicial and other institutional weaknesses.

A telltale analysis of national strengths and weaknesses can be found in "Nations in Transit 2014," an annual assessment of democratic governance -- or lack thereof -- in 29 post-communist countries of Europe and Eurasia. The report is published by Freedom House, a trusted, non-profit Washington-based premier promoter of human rights and democracy worldwide. The summer 2014 report, based on measurable signs, assembled and analyzed by several hundred international scholars, researchers, and journalists, rates levels of democratic governance under the following categories: electoral process, civil society, independent media, national democratic governance, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, and corruption.

This year's assessment is the 18th since the collapse of the Soviet empire. The Czech Republic scores high in the ratings, indeed in the top five, but also shows weaknesses that an aggressive Russia, for instance, could exploit.

The Freedom House findings, unfortunately, reflect an overall decline of democracy in this former communist-dominated transitory region. The map shows only 10 countries that are free, all of these being NATO and EU members. The remaining 19 states, including those siding with Putin in his war against the West, accommodate repression and resist reforms in varying degrees.

The Freedom House scores range from 1 to 7, 1 being the very best. Slovenia at 1.93 is the region's most open and most modern country, and features the least amount of governmental corruption and the freest press. Estonia follows at 1.93, Latvia at 2.07, then Poland at 2.18 and the Czech Republic at 2.25. Marring the latter two's good freedom rating is a high percentage of political corruption, as correlated by Transparency International and reinforced by Freedom House data.

Corruption has been a fact of life in Prague for years. This form of corrosiveness was highlighted last year when Prime Minister Petr Nečas' chief of staff and alleged paramour, Jana Nagyová, was indicted for abuse of power and bribery in June, and Nečas resigned shortly thereafter. Several members of Parliament were charged with corruption. The point is that dishonesty in power weakens the Czech Republic in today's geo-political environment, especially with Russia ready to penetrate by stealth and to control policy outcomes.

Along with corruption, the Czech freedom rating was downgraded in another key category, the media. Ownership of press dailies is in the hands of just two business magnates, one of whom fared well in the 2013 general elections. This points to the growing ties among business, politics, and media. The election campaign also featured attempts to curb editorial freedom at the public television station.

Russia, the world's largest exporter of natural gas, holds strings of power over the Czech Republic in the energy field as two-thirds of Czech gas imports come from Gazprom, the Russian state-owned and operated company. In Slovakia, gas imports from Russia are close to 100 percent. Gazprom filling stations and logos on vehicle bumpers are manifest throughout both countries. And as we have observed in the energy field since the 1990s, Kremlin meddling works in two ways -- those who can be intimidated and those who can be bought. Dishonesty is pursued by Russia under its own guise of "humanitarian intervention," many foreign government officials being easy prey.

As a bright spot, to offset this use of the dark side of soft power, a brilliant Czech mathematician and successful business entrepreneur, Karel Janeček, a 41 year old Ph.D, has formed an anti-corruption foundation and advocates the reform of Czech politics, i.e., cleaning officials being easy prey. As a bright spot, to offset this use of the dark side of soft power, a brilliant Czech mathematician and successful business entrepreneur, Karel Janeček, a 41 year old Ph.D, has formed an anti-corruption foundation and advocates the reform of Czech politics, i.e., cleaning up prevailing bribery and the illegal flow of government money. I spent time with him during his June visit to Washington DC. His active anti-corruption program is called "Democracy 2.1." His reform program seeks to increase citizen consciousness about the degree and depth of corrupt conduct in Czech society, make leaders less vulnerable to influence from corporations and foreign funders, increase voter participation by expanding the number of votes per person, giving all parties of all ideologies equal access to the electoral process, allocate two seats to each district, and give voters greater flexibility through multiple votes to allow election of individuals more broadly supported than currently.

Overall, the Czech Republic needs to pursue more active and strategic measures to withstand pressures from without by strengthening itself from within. I suggest the following formula so that the Czech democracy can score higher next year.

1. Strike down the pervasive corruption in the political system. This requires broadening the electoral process, reforming and executing the rule of law, and increasing the independence of the judicial system.
2. Revitalize NATO and the EU, the Czech Republic being a member of both.
3. Lessen the Czech dependency on Russian energy, or as Georgetown University researcher Brenda Shaffer wrote in The Washington Post recently, "break Russia's hold on energy in Europe." In this era of shale gas, reach out to America as a major countervailing supplier. Make Temelin a genuine and productive peaceful nuclear reactor.
4. Negotiate, as soon as possible, the transatlantic free trade agreement.
5. Free up the Czech media.

Democracy is at stake. Western security is at stake. The future of a democratic, independent Czech Republic is at stake.
AFoCR and Sokol in the Town of West, Texas

On April 17, 2013, an ammonium nitrate explosion took place at the West Fertilizer Plant in West, Texas, located 70 miles due south of Fort Worth. The explosion occurred while emergency responders were fighting a fire at the plant. Fifteen people were killed and more than 150 buildings were damaged or destroyed. Investigations confirmed that it was the ammonium nitrate that exploded, but the cause of the fire remains unclear.

The explosion was so massive that many thought it had been an earthquake. Much of the town was destroyed including homes, an apartment building, a school, a senior citizen facility, and the Sokol facilities. The Sokol gymnasium and the adjacent Lone Star Hall have provided important venues for social gatherings for the citizens of West and the local region.

In the 19th century, West was settled predominantly by Czechs, who remain the dominant ethnic group to this day. Most all of the 2,900 residents claim at least some Czech heritage. Sokol, of course, has been an important organization in the lives of many Czechs, in Europe, the U.S., and throughout the world. The Sokol in West, established in January 1980, was no exception. The Sokol organization is dedicated to physical fitness through gymnastics for a sound body and mind, starting with children as young as three years old.

The initial explosion and deaths were so devastating that it took some time for the people of West to consider rebuilding, as so much had to be done. Yet, not long after the explosion, Czech Ambassador to the U.S. Petr Gandalovič flew to West to evaluate the situation and assured the people of West of the support and help of the Czech government. The government in Prague made a generous donation of over $200,000 to help rebuild the Sokol facilities.

AFoCR now is actively working with the people of West to determine how the gymnastic facility and the former Lone Star Hall can be replaced. The cost of doing both at the same time may be financially prohibitive, so it may be necessary to complete the entire project in stages. AFoCR Chairman Fred Malak and Vice-President Phil Kasik have traveled to West to evaluate the situation in person. Director Fritz Duda, who lives in Texas, has been leading the planning effort for reconstruction and serves as the point person for AFoCR on the project.

Sokol has not been deterred by the catastrophe, and the Sokol activities have continued in rented space so that the children of the town have not been deprived of the benefits of the program. It is anticipated that in the near future AFoCR will expand its efforts to raise additional funds for the project in West.

The 25th Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution (continued from page 1)

After the end of the official commemorative march, the students continued into downtown Prague, carrying banners and chanting anti-Communist slogans. Before they could reach Wenceslas Square, however, they were confronted and beaten by riot police. Notably, Petr Gandalovič, the current Czech Ambassador to the United States, but at that time a school teacher, participated in the march and was beaten by the police.

The police action, along with a false rumor that a student had died, enraged the otherwise complacent population, sparking continuing demonstrations. Within a few days, an estimated 500,000 came to protest, and on November 28, the Communist Party announced that it would relinquish power and end one-party rule. In early December, the borders with Austria and West Germany were opened, and on December 10, the first largely non-communist government was appointed. Václav Havel was elected President of Czechoslovakia on December 29, and the first democratic elections since 1946 were held in June 1990.

Peter Sís Exhibit Opens at National Czech & Slovak Museum and Library Cedar Rapids, IA

The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library announces that three-time Caldecott Medal winner and MacArthur Fellow Peter Sís on September 19, 2014, will open a curated retrospective of his career at the museum. The exhibit, entitled “Peter Sís: Cartography of the Mind,” focuses on his artistic interpretation of humankind’s unending quest for discovery. It will include an impressive selection of his original drawings, watercolors, and gouaches. Curator Emerita of the Brooklyn Museum, and Charlotte Kotik, a great-granddaughter of Czechoslovak President T.G. Masaryk, will attend the opening.

Sís has received accolades from all over the world, but his work speaks for itself. His extraordinary images bring unparalleled depth and imagination to his books, which are beloved by readers of all ages.

To learn more about the exhibit and special opening, go to www.NCSML.org.
Masaryk Birthday Celebration at Masaryk Memorial
Washington, DC - March 7, 2014
(photos by Lillis Werder)

Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič

AFoCR Directors and Czech Embassy Officers

AFoCR Director Michael Rokos

AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek Lays Flowers at Base of Masaryk Memorial

Chairman Fred Malek and President Tom Dine

Embassy of Slovakia Presents Floral Wreath

European Union Day Celebration at Czech Embassy in Washington, DC - May 10, 2014

The Czech Embassy Welcomes Over 3000 Visitors for the Open House

1920's Dance Performers

Deputy Chief of Mission Jaroslav Zajiček and Public Relations Officer Andrea Pohl

Police K-9 Unit from Rockville, Maryland, Demonstrates Skills of Czech-Bred Dogs

Czech Tourism Distributes Travel Information to Visitors

Second Secretary Cultural Attaché Robert Řehák Introduces Events of the Day
**Interpretive Plaque for Woodrow Wilson Monument**

To assist visitors to the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague, both Czechs and Americans, to better understand his contributions to Czech history, AFoCR this summer will install an interpretive plaque at the monument site. The plaque, as shown here, will be 35 by 23 inches in size and stand on a cantilevered exhibit base 32 inches off the ground. A similar plaque, on an identical exhibit base, stands at the Masaryk Memorial in Washington, D.C., to inform visitors about the first Czechoslovak President.

**Victims of Communism 20th Anniversary Commemorative Event**

Victims of Communism Memorial, Washington - 6/11/14 Photos by Lillis Werder

- Chairman of Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation Dr. Lee Edwards
- Over 150 Guests Attended the Ceremony
- Mrs. Annette Lantos Speaks About Communism
- Over 44 Floral Wreaths Were Donated
- Former Czech President Václav Klaus
- Memorial Wreaths Surround the Monument
- Award Recipient of 2014 Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom Myroslav Marynovych
- Victims of Communism Memorial Sculptor Thomas Marsh
- Congressman Dana Rohrabacher
- Executive Director of Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation Marion Smith
American Friends of The Czech Republic
4410 Massachusetts Avenue, NW #391
Washington, DC 20016

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