AFOCR Hosts Czech
Parliamentarians in Washington

In May 2019, AFOCR sponsored a visit to Washington, D.C., by five Members of the Czech Parliament (MPs) to interact with their American legislative counterparts in the U.S. Congress. With the assistance and cooperation of the Czech Embassy, AFOCR designed this innovative program with the goal of broadening and enriching the understanding of both Czech and American legislators about their respective political priorities and practices. The first highly successful experience of the program in 2017 motivated AFOCR to repeat and further develop the project this year.


The Czech participants were MP Ondřej Benešík, MP Jan Skopeček, MP Jaroslav Bžoch, MP František Kopřiva, and MP Zuzana Majerová Zahradníková. In accordance with AFOCR’s adherence to political neutrality, the MPs represented various parties across the Czech political spectrum. Similarly, the American hosts were both Republicans and Democrats.

The visitors also engaged in a series of meetings and discussions with officials from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the International Monetary Fund, and the White House Office of Cyber Security. They further benefited from a panel discussion on cyber security hosted by Chris Olson, CEO and founder of Media Trust.

The program was enhanced by a fieldtrip to Catoctin Mountain Park and the historic village of Thurmont in northern Maryland, organized by the Czech Embassy’s Deputy Chief of Mission, Zdeněk Beránek. The MPs also were hosted at dinners at the homes of AFOCR Advisor Christine Bedoret and of AFOCR Director Michelle Olson. The project was led by AFOCR Vice Presidents Patricia Stack and Kristyna Pellouchoud Driehaus.

The Czech MPs, as well as their American hosts, highly praised their experiences from the visit. Nothing like this “shadowing project” had been previously attempted in the halls of Congress prior to AFOCR’s first effort in 2017, and several foreign policy advisors on the staffs of Congressional representatives expressed their admiration for the program. The Czech MPs reported that the experience has had a profound effect on their understanding (continued on page 7)
Letter from AFoCR President Tom Dine

I am happy to report on my optimistic findings after a trip by AFoCR’s leadership to Prague in mid-June 2019, organized by AFoCR Vice President Kristyna Pellouchoud Driehaus.

First is background. At the start of the post-communist era, I regularly visited the Czech Republic as a senior U.S. government official and later lived and worked in the capital city as President of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty for nine years. I have experienced firsthand ups and downs within the Czech Republic and between Washington and Prague. In this visit, however, I was struck, indeed enthralled, by what I learned and a dozen other directors of AFoCR found. This latest visit was different; it was exceptional, matching the AFoCR mission. From a host of leading Czech government officials in key foreign and security ministries plus the Speaker of Parliament, as well as top American Embassy personnel, each spontaneously and confidently expressed positive reports on the state of the bilateral relationship between the United States and the Czech Republic. A common term often used was “very good.”

Policies and personalities, the stuff of history, seemed to be in sync on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, the 12th person to hold that office since the 1989 revolution, engaged in a lengthy session with President Donald Trump at the White House on March 9, 2019, the birthday of Czechoslovak liberator Tomáš G. Masaryk. Babiš also met with various U.S. government officials and members of Congress as well as AFoCR directors. Leading figures in both governments reported the continuing positive effects, with Babiš “riding high” and Trump “pleased” with the relationship. One close observer reported that the two national leaders “are still glowing” three months since that meeting. Another, an attendee in the Oval Office, reflected, “They like each other, they expressed common interests, they made a few deals on the spot.”

Bilateral diplomatic and security relations are close and strong, while economic and energy relations are growing. U.S. Ambassador Stephen King, at a reception in honor of AFoCR at his historic official residence, stated that the Czechs are “side-by-side with the Americans in a variety of sensitive sites in the Middle East against terrorism, in Africa to compete with the Chinese, and in Latin America, particularly dealing with hostile regimes in Venezuela and Cuba.” In Afghanistan, the Czechs in 2018 lost three combat soldiers in a Taliban suicide bombing attack while patrolling the perimeter of Bagram Air Force base. The Czech Minister of Defense called the soldiers “heroes,” and the U.S. Defense Department publicly agreed.

In the arenas of soft power and cyber combat, the Czechs are determinedly striving to keep the Russian anti-West digital disinformation campaign at bay. AFoCR directors spoke with top officials of the Czech Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs about this concern. Our briefers labeled the Kremlin’s media campaign conducted by the organizations “Sputnik” and “Russia Today” as agencies of “influence peddling and propaganda.” We heard from Czech journalists and non-governmental organizations about Russia’s 24/7 efforts, including its more than 40 websites. These Czech activists are closely monitoring, reporting on, and countering Russian propaganda in Prague and the Czech countryside, as well as in the Visegrad region of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Hungary is the biggest worry for the Czechs, as its leadership sidles up to Moscow in its anti-liberal, anti-NATO, and anti-EU efforts. Concerned Czechs reported that the Russian diplomatic mission has been beefed up to 145 or more, of which a good third are now detailed to spread active disinformation. Russian political propagandists and others are currently assigned to the Russian Embassy in Prague in an ongoing anti-West information war. We learned of further attacks during our briefing from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

The closeness of the Czech/U.S. relationship is manifested most vividly in the defense field. The Czech Republic currently is celebrating its 20th anniversary of NATO membership, and at his White House meeting, Prime Minister Babiš announced the plan to purchase a new fleet of American military helicopters. The weapon systems currently under consideration are Textron’s Bell Helicopter of Fort Worth, Texas, or the Black Hawk made by Sikorsky of Stratford, Connecticut. Subsequently, the State Department approved a one billion dollar purchase; it is now up to the Czechs to negotiate a price and choose the vendor.

The reinvigorated Czech/U.S. alliance -- between a small and a big country — has reached the geopolitical conceptual point enunciated by Tomáš Masaryk in 1919: “...when a small nation accomplishes something with its limited means, what it achieves has an immense and exceptional value.” That exceptional point is where Prague and Washington are today.

Thomas A. Dine
President, AFoCR
Passing of AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek

Frederic Vincent Malek
1936-2019

The Directors of American Friends of the Czech Republic (AFoCR) mourn the passing of our esteemed friend and Chairman Fred Malek, who went to his eternal rest on Sunday, March 24, 2019. A native of Berwyn, Illinois, Fred was one of the most influential and successful Americans of Czech descent. He made outstanding contributions to the bonds between the Czech Republic and the United States, to freedom and democracy for the Czech people, and to civic life in his American homeland. His long and varied career included military service in Vietnam, business, investments, philanthropy, public service, politics, and non-profit leadership, for which he received numerous awards.

As of his passing, he was Founder and Chairman of Thayer Lodging. Previously in his business career he was President and CEO of Marriott Hotels and Northwest Airlines, as well as Co-Chairman of CBRE. As a partner with former President George W. Bush, he co-owned the Texas Rangers Baseball Club. As a philanthropist, he was Chairman of the Board of Visitors of West Point, Founder and Director of the American Action Network, Founder and Chairman of the American Action Forum, and Chairman of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, as well as a Director of the Aspen Institute and the American-Israel Friendship League.

Named after him and his wife, Marlene, are the Frederic Malek West Point Visitors Center and the Marlene and Fred Malek School of Health Professions at Marymount University. As AFoCR’s Chairman, Fred raised the funds to build the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague and led the rebuilding of the Sokol gymnasium in the town of West, Texas, after a disastrous industrial explosion in 2013.

His awards included the 2014 Distinguished Graduate award from West Point as well as the ADL Achievement Award from the Anti-Defamation League.

In addition to his business career, Fred served as an advisor to four U.S. Presidents. He appeared frequently on television news shows including Fox News, Meet the Press, Fox Sunday, and Face the Nation.

A graduate of West Point and the Harvard Business School, he served in Vietnam as an Army airborne ranger with a special forces team. In addition to his wife, he leaves two children, Michelle Olson and Fred Malek, Jr., and five grandchildren. Besides family, his passions included biking, hiking, and cross-country skiing.

His passing is a huge loss to AFoCR, but his legacy will live on in our shared memories. From the time in 2002 when he became our Chairman, Fred never wavered in his support and valued leadership, as he lived his Czech heritage for the good of all Czechs here and abroad. We are grateful for all the wisdom and generosity he shared.

Fred will be missed by his AFoCR colleagues, and our condolences go out to his family and his many other dear friends and colleagues. A great leader, mentor, and friend who walked with all and led many. May he rest in peace.

AFoCR Study Mission to Prague June 2019

Nine Officers and Directors participated in the third AFoCR study mission to Prague from June 9 to 14, 2019. The participants were Tom Dine, Phil Kasik, Barbara Gibian, Kristyna Pellouchoud Driehaus, Patricia Stack, Robert Doubek, Jan Smilek, Michelle Olson, and Cecelia Rokusek. They were accompanied by AFoCR Advisors John Pellouchoud and Christine Bedoret, along with spouses Mary Kasik, Bob Petrik, and Joan Dine. All participants paid their own expenses for the trip, and AFoCR Vice President Kristyna Pellouchoud Driehaus admirably accomplished its planning and coordination.

The mission’s purpose was to obtain current information about Czech political, economic, media, and civil society realities, as well as the state of the U.S. relationship with the Czech Republic.

Meetings were held with high ranking Czech government officials along with a range of civil society, NGO, media, and higher education leaders. One focus of the Directors was to explore potential new pro-democracy projects with Czech NGOs.

Government officials who met with AFoCR included Mgr. Tomáš Petříček, Ph.D., Minister of Foreign Affairs; Radek Vondráček, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies; Ambassador Veronika Kuchyňová Šmigolová, Junior Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; PhDr. Mgr. Jakub Landovský, Deputy Minister of Defense and Armed Forces; Jakub Kuhlhánek, Deputy Minister of the Interior; and JUDr. Bohumil Hnidek, Director of the Ministry of Interior International Department. Prof. MUDr. Milena Králičková, Ph.D. Vice-Recteur for Study Affairs Charles University, briefed the Directors on Czech higher education, while journalists Mgr. Lenka Zlámalová, of the internet news server Echo 24, and Ondřej Kundra, of Respekt newsmagazine, provided insights on the state of Czech journalism. In the NGO realm, meetings were with Jiří Schneider, Executive Director of Aspen Institute Central Europe, as well as with Radko Hokovský, Founder and Chairman of the Executive Board, Klára Veverka, Deputy Director for Operations, and Veronika Vichová, Coordinator of the Kremlin Watch Program, of European Values.

John Nylin, U.S. Embassy Counselor for Political and Economic Affairs provided an insightful briefing on current U.S./Czech relations, and U.S. Ambassador Stephen King hosted the delegation at a reception at his residence, the historic Petschek Villa, a masterpiece of Baroque Revival architecture. Czech guitar master and composer Lukaš Sommer performed, and as a special treat Ambassador King provided a demonstration of the newly restored dropping panel walls leading to the residence’s garden. (continued on page 7)
Letter from Czech Parliamentarian
Mgr. Ondřej Benešík

In the second half of May, at the invitation of the American Friends of the Czech Republic, I made a work-study visit to Washington D.C. I had visited the United States and Washington several times in the past, and I had used the opportunity to attend workshops and seminars, as well as social events organized by AFoCR. From the point of view of a legislator from the Czech Republic, I assess this activity in the most positive way. It gives a unique opportunity to get to know the backstage of American politics and makes it possible to establish informal contacts with important players in American public life and politics that standard bilateral business trips in the realm of parliamentary diplomacy can allow only to a limited extent. Discussions with counterparts in the Congress, the White House, and the Department of State allowed me and my colleagues to exchange information and experiences in addressing specific issues with which the Chamber of Deputies is currently dealing. These include, for example, securing cyber and energy security and crafting legislation to screen problematic foreign investments.

Very interesting were the discussions on the situations in Venezuela and Cuba. I have been dealing with this topic for a long time, and the information gathered in discussions with State Department diplomats is extremely valuable to me in gaining a broader view of the situation in the region. It is interesting that the Czech Republic, despite its geographical distance, has become home to a number of Cubans fleeing the communist regime. In addition, we have recently had great interest from Venezuelans with Czech roots in relocating to their ancestral homeland though the Krajan program. This offer of the Czech Government has already been utilized by several dozen expatriates.

Unique was the possibility of "shadowing" the work of a Member of Congress. My host was Jeff Fortenberry from Nebraska. He was a very appropriate choice. I have a lot in common with Jeff, and in politics we focus on similar topics. For me, this Washington mission ended symbolically the following week in Prague, as Congressman Fortenberry visited Prague a few days after my departure from D.C. During his visit to the Czech Republic, we met several times and extended our range of topics to include EU/US relations and domestic policy issues.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the American Friends of the Czech Republic for making this trip possible, for the excellent organization of our stay in the USA, and for the interesting social and cultural program. In particular, I would like to thank Kristyna (Driehaus) and Patty (Stack) for their personal commitment and preparation of our trip to D.C. I would also like to express my conviction that in the future other legislators from the Chamber of Deputies will have this unique opportunity to get to know American politics, to gain information, experience, and contacts, and to support the interests of the Czech Republic and our compatriots in the USA. The United States is not just a mere partner but also an ally. We share interests with the partner and values with the ally. We must not forget this when building relationships.
AFoCR DIRECTORS’ VISIT PRAGUE – JUNE 2019

Journalists Symposium with Ondřej Kundra of Respekt and Lenka Zlámalová of Echo 24

AFoCR President Tom Dine and U.S. Ambassador Stephen King at Ambassador’s Residence

AFoCR Director Michelle Olson and Ambassador King

Jan Farský, Aspen Institute Central Europe (AICE) Board, Director Jiří Schneider, AICE Executive Director, Michelle Olson, and Dana Baschová, Deputy Executive Director AICE

AFoCR Directors with Speaker Radek Vondráček, Chamber of Deputies

AFoCR Directors with Ambassador Veronika Šmigolová, Junior Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ambassador Robert Řihák

AFoCR Directors with Deputy Minister of Defense and Armed Services Jakub Landovský

AFoCR Directors at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty with Joanna Levison, Director, Media and Public Affairs

AFoCR Directors in a working meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czernin Palace
Brian Vanicek
Becomes
Newest
AFoCR Advisor

AFOCR President Tom Dine announced that Brian Vanicek of Texas has agreed to serve as an AFOCR Advisor. Vanicek is the Honorary Consul of the Czech Republic for the State of Texas, as well as the President of SPJST, a fraternal insurance organization with approximately 40,000 members in 104 lodges throughout Texas. Local lodges sponsor an impressive array of family-oriented activities, including community service projects, recreational events, dances, picnics, and musical and choral groups. Vanicek’s Consular Office is at the Czech Center Museum Houston.

The Directors of AFOCR are sad to report that Effie Rosene, the founder of the Czech Center Museum Houston, passed away in May. The City of Houston, the State of Texas, and many others who recognize her major contributions mourn the passing of this pillar of the American Czech community. Many traveled long distances to honor her memory and celebrate her life at an event hosted at the Museum. Rosene was a major force in advocating for the display and celebration of Czechoslovak history and culture in Texas and was the driving force behind the Museum, which will continue as a significant institution to fulfill that mission. Its place in the Museum District of Houston will serve as a fitting memorial to her inspirational leadership and dedication to the cause of Czech culture and history.

In April, Rosene received word that she and her husband of 65 years, Bill Rosene, would be receiving the AFOCR Civil Society Vision Award this coming November, in recognition of their work.

Revolution 1989

It has been 30 years since the tumultuous events of 1989 shook the world. In honor of that anniversary, the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML) created an exhibition called Revolution 1989.

While Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution is, of course, our favorite 1989 story, we kept in mind that the citizens of many countries rebelled against communist regimes that year. We also knew we needed to provide a bit of background to our visitors. It seemed unfair and unwise to drop them unsuspectingly into 1989, when many people, especially those under 40, might be unaware of the pre-1989 communist grip on Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the Space Race and the Cold War.

The exhibition, which runs through 9/8/19, begins with a definition of communism, the ten planks of communism (taken from the Communist Manifesto), and a timeline. The timeline highlights the events and dates of communism’s takeover of several countries, identifying key figures and events.

The exhibit’s next section tells the story of life under communism across the globe. The NCSML does not have artifacts in its collections to tell this story, so we looked for other museums who could loan items. We borrowed fabulous artifacts from The Cosmosphere in Hutchinson, Kansas, including a model of Sputnik made in the USSR for Nikita Khrushchev to give to dinner party guests, a box from a toy missile base, and a windshield from a spy plane.

Another partner is the Cold War Museum in Virginia. This institution lent the NCSML flags from the Warsaw Pact countries and many military uniforms, propaganda posters, and pieces of surveillance and military equipment.

A large part of the exhibition deals with the Berlin Wall, and the NCSML borrowed many fascinating items from the DDR Museum in Berlin. The DDR Museum is a repository for all things related to communist East Germany. Loaned artifacts include Young Pioneer uniforms and posters. The Young Pioneers was a youth group similar to Scouts in that children attended meetings, wore uniforms, went to camp, and marched in parades. Every communist country had a version of this organization, which was designed to teach youth about the virtues of communism. Other items from the DDR museum include secret police uniforms, spy equipment, pieces of the border, signs, and posters.

The history of the 20th century has been recorded on film by both amateurs and journalists. The exhibition includes a kiosk and large screen where visitors may select clips from important news stories from the Cold War years and the events of 1989. Examples include the story of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, the Solidarity movement in Poland, the 1968 Prague Spring, and the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Tiananmen Square, China’s brief revolt and the tragic events of June 4, 1989, are a part of the exhibition but we had no artifacts to tell the story. We were fortunate to find a professor at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis whose wife took photographs of the extraordinary protests in Beijing in June 1989. We enlarged several of these images to wall size and have posted a text panel that recounts the protests and the brutal onslaught by the People’s Liberation Army against the citizens. While China denies the massacre took place, it is well known to the rest of the world, where possibly up to 10,000 people were killed. This is a sobering part of the exhibit, reminding visitors that communism did not fall in China as it did in so many other countries highlighted in Revolution 1989.

The exhibition wraps up with the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia on November 17, 1989. The NCSML has a fabulous collection of original student protest posters created in Olomouc, Czechoslovakia. The students did not have access to printers and copy machines, so they hand lettered and painted the posters and signs. Dr. James Grove was a visiting professor in Olomouc at the time, and after the fall of communism, he noticed the posters were being thrown away. Dr. Grove saved as many as he could, brought them back to the United States and eventually gave them to the NCSML. They are among our most prized artifacts. Revolution 1989 is an informative exhibition, highlighting a part of history that must not be forgotten.
(Czech Parliamentarians in Washington continued from page 1) and appreciation for the American political process, as well as for the democratic values embraced by both countries. AFoCR will continue to develop and implement this innovative program as a key priority in its overall mission to promote excellent relations between the two countries.

(Directors’ Visit to Prague continued from page 3) Directors also met with Magdalena Drsova, Executive Director of Bakala Philanthropy, and visited Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty International Broadcasting Headquarters for a tour and an in-depth briefing, hosted by Joanna Levison, Director of Media and Public Affairs.

Among the encouraging findings from the visit are that U.S./Czech relations are strong and positive and all government ministries are committed to NATO and the EU, while Czech defense spending is to increase to 2.0% of GDP by 2024. Among the concerns are Chinese and Russian disinformation operations targeted at the Czechs.

Each Czech official expressed condolences on the passing of AFoCR’s esteemed chairman, Fred Malek, and lauded AFoCR’s many accomplishments. Multiple press releases were distributed by the various ministries about the AFoCR meetings.

AFoCR Advisor
Senator Richard Lugar Passes

Richard G. Lugar, the longest serving U.S. Senator from the state of Indiana (36 years) and an Advisor to American Friends of the Czech Republic, died this spring at the age of 87. He was a man for all seasons in the field of American foreign policy. He traveled to almost all countries of the world; he participated in innumerable international conferences, and he engaged over the years in seemingly intractable international issues on behalf of reconciliation. He concentrated on reducing the threat of nuclear usage, dismantling chemical and biological weaponry, and moving the Republican Party in support of foreign economic assistance to the poorest countries. After 1989, he pushed the Bush administration to reengage vigorously with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. He was known among his colleagues as the "statesman of the Senate."

George Drost Receives Award

At a gala at the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library on May 31, 2019, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, AFoCR Director George Drost received the President’s Award for outstanding contributions to preservation and leadership in the promotion of democratic and free societies. Drost was honored for his extraordinary contributions to the museum and library, where he currently serves as Chair of the Museum’s Board of Trustees. In his remarks, Drost talked about how his father took his precious typewriter with him when he emigrated from Moravia. That, along with his Czech-manufactured JAWA motorcycle, are notable parts of a permanent exhibit in the museum.

2019 Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture

The year 2019 is significant in the history of both the Czech and Slovak Republics, as they jointly celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. In the spirit of a unified commemoration of Czechoslovak freedom in November 1989, Katarína Cséfalvayová and Šimon Pánek will share the lectern for the annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture, set for November 13, 2019, at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. Ms. Cséfalvayová is Chair of the Slovak Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee, and Mr. Pánek, a student activist during the Velvet Revolution, is Executive Director of the Czech global charity People in Need.
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