



SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

May 2016

www.dcslovaks.org

Slovakia Assumes Presidency of the Council of the EU in July

New Government Formed Following March Elections; Fico Has Surgery

Slovakia will achieve another milestone in the international relations arena when it assumes the presidency of the Council of the European Union on July 1, for the six-month period through the end of 2016.

The European Union (EU) has a rather complex governing structure, comprised of several key institutions. The lawmaking process involves three main institutions: the European Commission is the EU's executive branch and has the sole right to propose legislation; the Council of the European Union approves laws, among other duties; and the European Parliament approves laws jointly with the Council.

The Council of the EU represents member states, and different ministers are assigned to several specific issue areas (e.g. agriculture ministers decide farm policy, etc.); each minister in each issue area can approve legislation on behalf of the member's government. Thus, there is no one individual person who assumes the presidency. The Council presidency, with the exception of the foreign affairs area, is held by a pre-established group of three member states for an 18-month period, with each of the three countries acting as chair for one six-month period. Currently, the Council presidency is held by the Netherlands. Then, in the second half of 2016, Slovakia will assume the presidency, and a Slovak minister will chair each of the issue area committees. The three-country rotation will be completed by Malta in the first half of 2017.

The EU member states holding the presidency are guided by a common program for the 18-month period drawn up by all three of the member states. Each EU country in turn takes charge of the Council agenda and chairs all the meetings for its six-month period, promoting legislative and political decisions, and brokering compromises among the member states. Thus, while the country holding the presidency sets the agenda, its role is not to push its own country's interests as much as it is to act as an honest broker in achieving consensus on law and policy.

On April 18, the EU Delegation to the U.S. hosted a forum in Washington where the priorities of the upcoming Slovak presidency were discussed by Ivan Korcok, Slovak Deputy Minister of Foreign and European Affairs. Mr. Korcok outlined the program priorities that are under consideration by the Slovak government, focusing on financial and economic matters, trade issues, the migration issue, and EU enlargement. Financial and economic matters will include approving the EU budget, enhancing competitiveness, particularly for SMEs (small and medium-size enterprises), advancing fiscal integration throughout the EU, and promoting energy security. Trade will also be a focus, mainly by (continued, p. 2)

President's Message

Dear Members,

As your new president, I would like to wish everyone good health, happiness, and prosperity in 2016.

I am pleased to announce that SASW will be launching a number of initiatives during the year to expand our social media presence and to promote the organization, to help grow our membership. We also plan to offer more social events, to give members the opportunity to gather more casually and more frequently. Please look for announcements in the coming weeks about our latest guest speakers, cooking demonstrations, social gatherings, and City University fundraisers.

Thank you for your continuing support, and I look forward to meeting you at future events.

Brian Belensky

Slovak EU Presidency (continued from p. 1)

encouraging progress in the negotiations with the U.S. over the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement (TTIP). While EU enlargement is on the agenda, Korcok noted that the migration crisis will demand a lot of attention, and could come to dominate the agenda. Slovakia will be in a somewhat sensitive position due to its internal policy on migrants, and this will test its ability to play the role of consensus-builder. Another wild-card that Korcok noted is the Brexit issue, in which the United Kingdom will vote in a late-June referendum on whether to stay in the EU. If the British vote No, then the repercussions will definitely dominate the agenda, as well as the news cycle, during the Slovak presidency.

New Government Formed

Parliamentary elections were held in Slovakia on March 5 and resulted in a new governing configuration. The election results saw Robert Fico's SMER-SD hold on to its dominant position, but with a significant-enough drop in support that it could no longer maintain the unprecedented single-party government of the prior four years. A total of eight parties met the 5% threshold to enter parliament. There were surprises in the fragmented election, such as the resurgence of the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) and the rise of a newcomer, the far-right People's Party - Our Slovakia (L'SNS), led by Marian Kotleba. Meanwhile, the old-standby Christian Democrats (KDH) did not meet the threshold to enter parliament. President Andrej Kiska charged Mr. Fico with forming a new government, and after much negotiation a coalition of four parties agreed to form the government. Mr. Fico's SMER-SD will lead a government that includes the SNS, chaired by Andrej Danko, Most-Hid (Bridge-Bridge), a moderate Hungarian party led by Bela Bugar, and Siet (Network) chaired by Radoslav Prochazka. The four parties published their coalition agreement on April 13; it includes a range of priorities, such as updating Slovakia's defense strategy, lowering taxes, fighting corruption, reducing red tape for entrepreneurs, providing greater support for expats, and improving the education and health care systems.

Shortly after the coalition program was published, it was announced that PM Fico was hospitalized on April 14 and subsequently underwent coronary heart bypass surgery. Indications are that the surgery was successful, and after he is released from the hospital, Mr. Fico will begin a seven-week period of recovery. We wish him a speedy recovery.

SASW Speakers' Series Talk

The Slovak American Society of Washington, DC, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Slovak Republic, invites you to a talk,

“Today’s International Challenges for Slovak Lawyers”

by Martina Hrvolová

Friday, May 6, 2016, at 7:00pm

at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic (3523 International Court, NW, Washington, DC)

The talk is free and open to the public, but an **RSVP is required** at < dcslovaks@yahoo.com > or (571) 265-4436, by COB May 5.

Is Slovakia's legal education system sufficiently preparing a new generation of international lawyers for the dilemmas they will face across the globe? They will be challenged by a variety of legal cultures across the world, different understandings of what law is, and how ethics comes into play in this increasingly globalized, and often increasingly troubled, world.

How should the Slovak legal education system evolve to prepare its graduates for the challenges of today's legal issues, such as negotiating with "adversaries" (imagine North Korea or various types of separatists)? What changes beyond the classroom would further promote global engagement? What tools will graduates need to gain a better understanding of their adversaries, and help them become sophisticated lawyers able to resolve disputes with worldwide impacts?

Martina Hrvolová recently joined the International and Comparative LL.M. Program of the George Washington University Law School. Previously, she served as a human rights expert in the Slovak Foreign Service from 2005 to 2010, when she was appointed Executive Secretary of the Slovak Chairmanship of the Council of Europe in 2007. Between 2010 and 2015, she was posted to the Slovak missions to NATO and the EU in Brussels, Belgium, and primarily advised on public affairs, NATO partnerships, EU enlargement, and the Western Balkans. She received her PhD in European Civil Law in 2010. Ms. Hrvolová is an acting judge in the most prominent international moot court competition, and currently serves in the office of the ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.

VSM/City U. Scholarship Awardees Thank SASW

SASW expects to continue to support scholarships in 2016 for Slovak students to attend VSM/City University in Slovakia. There is still time to contribute before the end of the academic year.

Recently, SASW received thank-you letters from the three students it supported in 2015-16. **Lucie Jerabkova** wrote that the award, "strengthened my self-esteem and will to achieve something in life." Recipient **Noemi Illesova** told of working for a company that is struggling with layoffs and how the scholarship has become one of the biggest motivators in my life. **Veronika Froncova**, who was awarded the scholarship honoring the late SASW member Millie Schoepe-Evans, wrote, "your scholarship has lightened our family's burden of paying tuition and fees, and enabled me to focus even more on my professional goals. Thanks to you, I am one step closer to achieving them. If you'd like to see the full letters, drop a note, or email to dcslovaks@yahoo.com, and we'll send you copies.

Slovak and Rusyn History and Culture Discussed in Pittsburgh

Reported by Kathryn Tatko

On February 1, John Righetti, a former president of the National Carpatho-Rusyn Association, spoke in Pittsburgh to the Western Pennsylvania Slovak Cultural Association on the topic "Slovaks and Rusyns: Similarities and Differences."

I went to Pittsburgh to hear his talk, knowing he is an outstanding lecturer, who is very knowledgeable about his Slovak and Rusyn heritage.

He discussed five major topics: from where the Slovaks and Rusyns came, why they came, where they established themselves, their language influence in common geographical areas, and significant developments in the 1870s and 1880s, as discussed further below.

Rusyns are located in southern Poland (sometimes called Galicia or Lemko), eastern Slovakia, the Spisz area of Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, and some in Hungary. The ethnic and national boundaries are not necessarily the same.

John showed several slides of the movement of people over a period of 1,000 years, who came to what is now Slovakia. For example, Vlachs came from Romania and were called Volaska. They were sheep tenders, became part of the Rusyn culture, and brought *bryndza* cheese to Slovakia.

In 600 A.D., people in Eastern Europe lived in tribes. Western Slavs and Eastern Slavs, which included those who are now Belarusians, Carpatho-Rusyns, and Ukrainians. All of these people moved around and the interactions influenced regional dialects. For example, 40% of words in the Žariz dialect of Slovak comes from Rusyn words.

When the Hungarians came to the areas of Central and Eastern Europe (the beginning of their 1,000-year reign), the Slovaks were driven west and the Rusyns east. The Hungarians gave tax breaks to the Slovaks and Rusyns to move west and east respectively, and for Germans to come to the Spisz area as they were lace and glass makers. The Hungarians needed people with these skills. By 1868 the Hungarians were a minority in Eastern Europe, so they closed the Slovak, Ukrainian, and Rusyn schools and made all students learn Hungarian. The Ukrainians and Rusyns had to learn another alphabet, and in many cases, were not allowed to speak their native language at all. Because of the Hungarian influence, the Rusyn language has many Hungarian words, and in eastern Slovakia many of the county names are Hungarian.

Regarding religion. During the Reformation, the vast majority of Slovaks were Lutheran. St. Ignatius and the Jesuits brought Roman Catholicism to Slovakia. The Rusyns went to the Greek Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church. Then, as now, the Slovaks speak a West Slavic language and the Rusyns speak an Eastern Slavic language.

In the 1870s many Slovaks and Rusyns moved to cities, which could not create enough jobs, which caused a depression and economic dismay. Also, Hungarian military recruitment of young men was for 8 years of active service and 12 years of reserve duty. These two factors caused millions of Eastern Europeans to migrate to the U.S. Many of them would work and go back home to take money for the family and then return to the U.S. The U.S. quota laws passed in the 1920s made people stay in the U.S., because they realized if they went back to Eastern Europe, they would not be able to return.

In summary, John gave an interesting presentation. During his talk, he included many personal reflections on local Pittsburgh churches and neighborhoods.

SASW News and Notes

EU Open House . This annual event, during which the embassies of the European Union open their doors to the public, is a highlight of the Washington spring calendar. It will be held on **Saturday, May 14, from 10am to 4pm**. The program offered by the Slovak Embassy is always a big hit. Check www.euopenhouse.org for more info.

Embassy Series Concert . The Embassy of Slovakia will host a concert by the Hugo Kauder Trio on **Friday, May 27, at 7:00pm**. The Trio was formed to highlight the music of mostly unknown Jewish composer Hugo Kauder. The concert, *Jewels from Eastern Europe*, will include works of acclaimed composers such as Dvorak and Tchaikovsky, as well as Kauder, and also Slovak contemporary composer Ladislav Kupkovic. Tickets are \$80 and include a buffet, and are available through the Embassy Series at www.embassyseries.org, or by calling (202) 625-2361.

In Memoriam . SASW was sad to learn of the passing of **Joseph J. Hornack**, who was well-known in the Slovak-American community as a great promoter of Slovak genealogical research, and who made extensive contributions as assistant director of the Slovak Institute in Cleveland. He will be greatly missed.

SASW also only recently learned that **Andrew Stasny**, of Dagsboro, Delaware, passed away last June. Andy grew up in Natrona, PA, near Pittsburgh, and served in the Navy during the Korean War. He attended Duquesne University, where he studied pharmacy and also developed an interest in acting. He was employed by the VA hospital system, which eventually brought him to the DC area; he and his family lived in Silver Spring. Andy was active in the community and cultivated his Slovak heritage. Upon retiring, he moved to southern Delaware, where he maintained an active life in the community. Even though out of the DC area, he maintained his membership in SASW. We offer condolences to his wife, Marianne, and family.

Recent and Upcoming SASW Events . On March 12, SASW teamed up with the Slovak Meet-Up group to hold a successful *paska*- and *hrudka*-making demonstration. Our sincere thanks to **Eva Jenkins**, who hosted the event in her kitchen. As for future events, please see the flyer in this issue with information about the **SASW picnic on June 11**. Later in the year, the SASW Annual Membership Meeting is scheduled for October 22, and will feature a book talk by author Kevin McNamara, who will discuss his recent book *Dreams of a Great Small Nation*, a history of the Czechoslovak Legion. Finally, the SASW Sv. Mikuláz Party, a highlight of the holiday season calendar, is scheduled for December 4. Details forthcoming.

New Address for SASW . The SASW now has a P.O. Box address. You can write to:

Slovak American Society of Washington, D.C., P.O. Box 2502, Springfield, VA 22152-2502.

The **Slovak American Society of Washington** is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Contributions and membership dues are tax-deductible.

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WASHINGTON, DC
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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL/DONATION FORM**

New annual membership, and renewal of existing members for 2016, runs thru December 31, 2016.

Individual membership (\$25/year) \$ _____
 Family membership (\$35/year) \$ _____
 Optional tax-deductible donation:
 VSM/City U. scholarship fund \$ _____
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TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____

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_____ Yes, please contact me to help out with Society events!