



SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

October 2016

www.dcslovaks.org

SASW Annual Meeting and Speakers' Series Talk

SASW Annual Membership Meeting

Saturday, October 22, 12:30-1:30pm, at the Slovak Embassy*

At the annual meeting, the SASW Board will report on the status of SASW, review the year's activities, discuss plans for 2017, and take questions, ideas, or comments from the membership. Please come join us and meet others with shared interests—we'd love to see you!!! A light luncheon will be provided. Elections for three Board positions will also be held. The meeting will start at 12:30pm, and the guest speaker will follow at 2:00pm (just like prior years).

(at 2:00 pm – open to the public)

Kevin J. McNamara, author, will discuss his book

***Dreams of a Great Small Nation:
The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire,
Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe***

Admission free, but RSVP required to dcslovaks@yahoo.com > or (571) 265-4436 (leave names and number of attendees). This is an SASW event, please do NOT email the Slovak Embassy.

Kevin J. McNamara is an associate scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, PA, and a former contributing editor to its quarterly journal, *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*. He followed the path taken by the Czecho-Slovak Legion shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequently acquired the firsthand accounts that form the basis of his deeply researched and thoroughly engaging book. **Books will be available for purchase, and signing by the author.**

***The above events will be held at the Slovak Embassy, 3523 International Ct. NW, Washington, DC—near the Van Ness Metro station on the Red Line. Street parking is also available.**

Slovakia's First Post-Independence President, Michal Kováč, Passes at 86

On Wednesday, October 4, Michal Kováč, the first president of independent, post-communist Slovakia, died at the age of 86, from heart failure and after a battle with Parkinson's disease. He was buried in a state funeral on October 12.

Born August 5, 1930, in the village of Lubiša, Kováč graduated from the University of Economics and worked in the banking sector prior to entering politics after the 1989 anti-communist Velvet Revolution. He served as Czechoslovakia's finance minister in 1990-91, and was also speaker of Czechoslovakia's Parliament in 1992. After Slovakia became an independent nation in 1993, lawmakers elected him the new country's first president.

Kováč's presidency coincided with a difficult time for Slovakia. Under the government of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, Slovakia rejected an initial invitation to join the EU and NATO along with its central European post-communist neighbors, and Madeleine Albright, then US Secretary of State, called the country "the black hole of Europe". Domestically, Kováč's tenure was characterized by tensions arising from Mečiar's authoritarian tendencies, which escalated when Kováč's son was kidnapped and transported to Austria, allegedly by Mečiar's secret service. The investigation was never fully resolved and Mečiar issued an amnesty for the perpetrators when he became acting president after Kováč's term ended in 1998. Later that year, the reform coalition led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, defeated Mečiar and put Slovakia on the path to join NATO and the EU in 2004.

It is not generally known or remembered, but SASW hosted a private lunch for President Kováč in the early 2000s, when he visited Washington, DC.

Current Slovak President Andrej Kiska said in a statement, "Kováč's presidency was a time when a ruthless and brutal fight was being fought for the character and future of Slovakia ... He helped keep Slovakia on the path that eventually led to the European family of free nations and states."

Albright Visit Surprises Attendees at SASW's City University Fundraiser

For several years, SASW has held a fundraiser to benefit its scholarship fund for students at VSM/City University in Slovakia. This year's event was held on the evening of September 8, at Bistro Bohem, in Washington, DC, at a small restaurant featuring eastern European specialties. The evening featured music by Orchester Praževica, a popular local Slovak gypsy jazz group.

The Slovak-Americans and recent emigres who packed the room were enjoying the music, food, and camaraderie, when former Secretary of State Madeline Albright dropped by for a visit! The surprised attendees were thrilled to see such a famous national figure; many attendees took photos and had a brief chat, with some posting to social media. Secretary Albright made a few brief remarks at the event, commenting that although she was from Prague and identifies as a 'Czechoslovak,' when she was a young girl the folk clothing she wore on special occasions was from the Piešťany region. She seemed thrilled to be interacting with her ethnic 'cousins.'

Secretary Albright's visit to the event was serendipitous, as Ken Bombara, SASW member and a member of the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC), where he represents the Slovak League of America, was attending a meeting of the CEEC with Ms. Albright. He casually mentioned to her that the SASW fundraiser was being held nearby, and to his surprise she said, "I think I'll go!" Her visit helped make it a memorable evening, and the proceeds will benefit students in Slovakia. The fundraiser was organized by SASW board members Ray Luca and Helen Fedor. Even though you may have missed the event, you can still help support the SASW Scholarship Fund using the form in this newsletter.

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

Report to the Membership: October 2016

This year our society has continued its efforts to help foster awareness of Slovak cultural and current affairs. The following are the highlights:

Membership

As of September 30, 2016, we had 80 total memberships (42 Individual and 36 Family), for 114 members.

Financial

Our financial status is stable. Our total assets on September 30, 2016, were \$12,437.62. These assets are deposited in our business checking account with Bank of America (\$6,484.75), and a CD account with Lafayette Federal Credit Union (\$5,952.87).

City University

In May we donated \$3,750 to City University of Seattle; this supported five partial scholarships to needy students (selected by City University) in Slovakia. This sum was the largest amount ever donated by SASW in a single year.

On September 6, we held our third annual Café Night fundraiser at Bistro Bohem in Washington, DC, for City University Scholarships. Orchester Praževica provided the music for the event, and the highlight of the evening was a visit by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (see story, p.2). We raised \$410 at this event.

Programs

The following are events we have held, or are scheduled, during the 14th year of our Speaker Series:

May 6: Dr. Martina Hrvolová, a recent graduate of George Washington University Law School and former Slovak Foreign Service officer, gave a talk entitled, “Today's International Challenges for Slovak Lawyers;” at the Slovak Embassy.

September 17: SASW member Dr. George Mesko held a talk about his new book, *Confessions of a Refugee* in which he tells the tale of how he and his wife Judy left their home in 1968, in then-Czechoslovakia, for a short-term trip that turned into the journey of a lifetime; at the home of SASW member Eva Jenkins.

October 1: Dr. Michael J. Kopanic gave a presentation entitled “The Slovak Folk Calendar in the Fall,” in which he discussed the traditional celebrations and commemorations of the fall season: *dožinky*, *vinobranie*, Halloween, and All Saints' Day; at the Arlington County Central Library.

October 22: Kevin McNamara will give a talk about his recent book about the Czechoslovak Legion, *Dreams of a Great Small Nation*; at the Slovak Embassy.

Membership Initiatives

Over the past year, SASW has embarked on several initiatives to boost our presence on the Internet to attract new members.

We are currently revamping our website www.dcslovaks.org to enhance its functionality and increase the quantity and variety of content available to SASW members and visitors. When completed, the new website will have the capacity to play videos and to accept online payment for memberships, events, and donations.

We have created public pages on social media sites such as Twitter (<https://twitter.com/DCSlovaks>) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/dcslovaks/>) to raise our public profile and generate interest in Slovak

topics. If members are active on these social media outlets, please follow these pages and share them with your friends, family, and colleagues.

SASW has continued to support a social group on the Meetup website, <http://www.meetup.com/dcslovaks/> to attract younger members and more recent Slovak émigrés.

Other Activities

On March 12, we held a cooking demonstration at the home of SASW member Eva Jenkins, where we showed the attendees how to make traditional Slovak Easter foods such as *hrudka* cheese and *paska*.

On June 11, we held our annual picnic at the former home of founding member Millie Schoepe-Evans in Fairfax, VA. A special thanks to A.J. Costigan, Phyllis Locklear, and Ryan Willt for allowing us to hold the picnic at Millie's house one final time.

On December 4, our annual Svätý Mikuláš party will be held at the Slovak Embassy. Orchester Praževica will provide the musical entertainment.

2016 Board of Directors

Officers:

Brian Belensky, President
Ludovit Hintos, Vice President
Georgene C. Chastain, Treasurer
Anne Pavuk Wright, Secretary

At-Large Board Members:

Helen Fedor
John Husovsky
Marcel Lorincz
Ray Luca
Rich Palaschak

SASW News and Notes

Recent SASW Events – Since our last newsletter, and as noted above, SASW held several successful events over the summer. On June 11, SASW held its annual picnic on the property of the late Millie Schoepe-Evans. It was nostalgic for many of the attendees, as Millie's place was the location for many previous and memorable SASW picnics. While the property has been sold to be redeveloped, Millie's legacy will live on; it was nice that she provided the opportunity to say a fond farewell.

Next, on September 17, Dr. George Mesko discussed his latest book, which relates his and wife Judy's experiences in emigrating from Slovakia, and eventually on to the U.S. following the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The event was graciously hosted by Eva and Robert Jenkins at their home in Great Falls, VA. Dr. Mesko is currently on a book tour to promote his book in Slovakia, which is only available in Slovak. He is interested in finding a publisher for an English-language edition.

Most recently, on October 1, SASW sponsored a talk by Dr. Michael Kopanic on "Celebrating and Commemorating: The Slovak Folk Calendar in the Fall". Dr. Kopanic discussed the traditional events that mark the flow of time in rural village life, such as *dožinky*, *vinobranie*, Halloween, and All Saints' Day. He is a foremost expert on Slovak history and folklore, and a regular contributor to the Slovak fraternal newspaper *Jednota*.

We thank the speakers, hosts, organizers, and attendees for helping to keep SASW an active and vibrant organization.

News and Notes (continued)

Christmas Market – The Slovak Embassy and the Austrian Cultural Forum invite you to a “Slovak Christmas Market” to be held on Saturday, November 5, from 10am to 5pm, at the Slovak Embassy in Washington, 3523 International Ct., Washington DC. The event features a vast selection of beautiful handmade ornaments from Slovakia and the Czech Republic (European Trading Co., Inc.), traditional Christmas soup and mulled wine, Christmas carols by a children’s choir, and Swarkovski jewelry. Admission is free and no RSVP is necessary. Free parking on the streets near the embassy. Don’t miss it!

Czech & Slovak Freedom Lecture – Many SASW members will remember Slovak Ambassador Rastislav Káčer, who served in Washington 2003-08. Amb. Káčer, who is currently Slovakia’s ambassador to Hungary, will deliver the prestigious **Annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture** on Friday, November 18, 2016, at noon, at the Woodrow Wilson Center (WWC), in the Ronald Reagan Building in downtown Washington, DC. He will speak on the theme of “US Relations with Central Europe: Love and Reason.” The lecture is jointly sponsored by Friends of Slovakia and the American Friends of the Czech Republic. Invitations will be sent out to those on the WWC mailing list, but otherwise you may want to check the WWC website for information at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/events>.

Kids Euro Festival – This annual event, hosted by the countries of the European Union, will take place from October 26 thru November 6, and is a two-week long festival of European arts and culture that presents a variety of activities for DC-area children and families. It encompasses performances, concerts, movies, storytelling, and other activities; it is free to the public. More information, and a schedule of events, is available at www.kidseurofestival.org.

Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU – As a key part of Slovakia’s term of holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the heads of state or government of the 28 EU members met in Bratislava on September 16 to begin political reflection on further development of an EU with 27 member countries, particularly in light of the decision of Great Britain to leave the EU (i.e. “Brexit”). The leaders agreed on the “Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap,” which set out their objectives for the coming months. This document focuses on four key areas: restoring full control of the external borders; ensuring internal security and fighting terrorism; strengthening EU cooperation on external security and defense; boosting the single market and offering better opportunities for young Europeans. EU President Donald Tusk (of Poland) noted, “I hope that the Bratislava summit will lead to the renewing of trust and confidence in the European Union.”

The Slovak presidency was highlighted in Washington on October 6, with a forum co-hosted by the Slovak Foreign Ministry and the Atlantic Council, a foreign-policy think tank. The forum, “Stronger with Allies: The Future of Europe after Brexit,” featured key foreign policy officials and experts, who shared varying perspectives on issues confronting Europe and the transatlantic alliance. Slovak Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák was featured at the forum, and he reaffirmed the commitment of Europe to overcome its challenges. Also, speaking at the forum was Amb. Rastislav Káčer, Slovakia’s ambassador to Hungary. Amb. Káčer is fondly remembered as ambassador to the US 2003-08. Káčer made several insightful remarks, particularly in regard to the challenges arising from Russia’s “information war” and its efforts to destabilize its neighbors.

The prior week saw the visit of the Slovak State Secretary of the Slovak Foreign Ministry, Mr. Lukáš Parížek, who participated in the annual conference of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) on September 28, in Washington, DC. The conference, “Saving the West – Priorities and Principles,” also addressed the threats to Western democracies and the transatlantic alliance arising from Russia, and rising populism in Europe. The conference also commemorated the 25th anniversary of the formation of the “Visegrad Four” (V-4) alliance among Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. The V-4 has served as a coordinating body to facilitate regional cooperation among the four countries. Poland currently holds the rotating Presidency.

BOOK REVIEW by Georgene Chastain

***Ma's Dictionary: Straddling the Social Class Divide, a Memoir*, by Milan Kovacovic. Duluth, MN: Greysolon Press, 2011.**

Milan Kovacovic was born in 1942, in Normandy, France, of Slovak parents who were foreign guest workers there. Shortly after his birth, his father died of cancer. Now his mother had to work to support all three of her children. Two older daughters, Eva and Olga, were being raised by relatives in Slovakia. Milan's mother was employed as a live-in domestic worker by the wealthy Lavril family in Le-Moulin-Sagout, and later as a cook for the equally wealthy Kapferer family in Paris. Milan was raised by an elderly peasant couple, Old Man Lapais and the Widow Vermot, in the nearby village of Saint-Aquilin-de-Pacy-sur-Eure. After his father's death, his mother returned to her village in Slovakia, Bzince pod Javorinou, in an attempt to reunite with her extended family. There Milan met his two older sisters for the first time.

When his mother realized that she could not stay in Slovakia, she returned to France, taking Milan and his sister, Olga, with her. Eva would stay in Slovakia and continue to be raised by her relatives. Olga stayed with Milan in Saint Aquilin for two years and when she reached the age of 18, she also became a live-in domestic worker. Milan stayed in Saint Aquilin for 10 years and attended school there. After he reached the end of his education in the village one-room schoolhouse, he attended boarding school outside of Paris on a full scholarship. Because he was surrounded by other boys from wealthy families in this new situation, and because he spent weekends and holidays with his mother in the Kapferer mansion at 64 Avenue Henri-Martin in Paris, he was exposed to the ways of the wealthy French citizen. As he says in his memoir, "although my upbringing had taken place at the lowest rung of the peasantry, I had also since infancy been closely exposed to rich people and their way of life, through Maman's employment. I had no doubt absorbed some of their traits." (p.135)

When he was 14 years old in 1956, Milan and his mother immigrated to America. His sister Olga remained in Paris. They stayed briefly in New York City and then moved to Chicago, where Milan attended high school while his mother worked outside the home to support him. In this large Midwestern city, Milan, homesick for Paris, associated with working class boys, many of whom dropped out of school as soon as they could. Milan began his teenage years in America without direction, ambition, or encouragement from benefactors, wealthy or otherwise. He went on to graduate from high school, but drifted about with no real idea what to do with his life.

This memoir is a collection of moments from the author's life that he feels have been pivotal. These recollections are more or less arranged to make a narrative, with the exception of the first few chapters, which take place in the present. Most of the narrative follows in logical order from the beginning of the author's life. *Ma's Dictionary* is well-written and interesting, with insight into the unique life of an immigrant of Slovak parentage. However, his mother has only a small part in this memoir, despite the title. And there is very little of the author's Slovak heritage that seems to have had any influence on his life.

Postscript: Some weeks ago, the televangelist Joel Osteen told the following joke on his Sunday morning TV show:

A woman dies and she approaches the 'Pearly Gates'. St. Peter is there to welcome her and says she can enter but there is one requirement, she has to spell a word. "What's the word", the woman asks? St. Peter replies, "Love". The woman then spells "L-O-V-E". St. Peter says "Welcome to Heaven!" He then says to the woman, "I have to run off for a bit, could you please stand here and apply the same procedure to anyone who comes up?" "Sure," she says. Shortly thereafter, the woman is surprised to see her ex-husband approaching the Pearly Gates. She tells her ex-husband that he has to spell a word if he wants to enter heaven. The ex-husband asks, "OK, what word"? The woman says, "Czechoslovakia...."

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D. C. MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL / APPLICATION / DONATION FORM

New membership or 2017 renewal runs through 12/31/2017.

Individual membership (\$25/year) \$ _____

Family membership (\$35/year) \$ _____

Tax-deductible donation (optional):

City University Scholarship Fund \$ _____

SASW General Fund \$ _____

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____

Mail your check (made out to the Slovak American Society of Washington, DC) and this form to:

**SASW Membership
P.O. Box 2502
Springfield, VA 22152-2502**

NAME(s) _____

ADDRESS _____

_____ ZIP+4 _____

TELEPHONE Home: () _____ - _____ Work: () _____ - _____

E-MAIL _____

Please Circle Your Selections:

Contact me to help out with SASW events: Yes No

Send my copy of the Newsletter via (select one): USPS Mail Email

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

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Mark Your Calendar!

SASW Svätý Mikuláš party on December 4 at the Slovak Embassy