



SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY  
OF WASHINGTON D.C.

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

**MAY 2023 NEWSLETTER**

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## President's Letter

*Ahojte* SASW members and friends! Welcome to Spring! We are thrilled to announce the second annual SASW/Friends of Slovakia (FOS) picnic, coming up on Sunday, May 21, 2023 at the Knights of Columbus in Arlington, the same place as last year's picnic. More information is located elsewhere in this newsletter.

We had a busy few months this year already. SASW joined FOS in celebrating the 30th anniversary of Slovak independence by co-hosting the Slovakia@30 speaker series. Speakers included Ambassador Javorčík, who spoke about "30 years of Slovak Foreign Policy" on January 18, at the Embassy of Slovakia. Professor Kevin Deegan-Krause spoke about "30 Years of Slovak Domestic Politics" on February 23, also in person at the Embassy of Slovakia. On March 16, Mr. Ivan Mikloš spoke to us from Slovakia about "30 Years of the Slovak Economy" in an online webinar. And Zuzana Wienk spoke to us from Bratislava about "30 Years of Slovak Civil Society" on April 13 in an online webinar. Summaries of the first two presentations can be found in this newsletter. Recordings of all four presentations will be available on the SASW YouTube channel very soon.

In February, SASW welcomed a new Board member, Marlene Yencho, after Virginia Sorkin resigned in November, 2022. Ms. Yencho's biography appears elsewhere in this newsletter. The SASW Board is pleased to welcome Marlene, and we especially appreciate her technology talents. We look forward to her helping us with keeping our website up-to-date.

Our SASW cookbooks have been a bestseller! Many of you have been purchasing them and enjoying the recipes, all contributed by our members and friends. The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has even purchased some of our cookbooks to sell in their gift shop. We will soon have an order form landing page on the SASW website, where you will be able to order cookbooks using PayPal or through the mail to our P.O. Box. We can ship cookbooks anywhere in the U.S., but please note that shipping will cost extra. Those in the D.C. area may arrange to pick up their cookbooks in person by contacting Vice President Marta Szotakova at [mszotakova@dcslovaks.org](mailto:mszotakova@dcslovaks.org). Cookbook sales benefit the City University scholarships for deserving Slovak students.

And if you are interested in Slovak genealogy or in joining a group of advanced Slovak speakers for conversation practice, check our website ([dcslovaks.org](http://dcslovaks.org)) for more information. The genealogy group meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month, at 7:00 p.m. EDT to discuss their family history research. The Advanced Slovak Conversation group meets every other Monday evening at 7:45 p.m.

**Georgene Chastain, President**  
**Slovak American Society of Washington, D.C.**

## SASW Slovak Endowment for the National Czech & Slovak Museum and Library

The donations for the SASW Slovak Endowment were finally sent to the National Czech and Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML) in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, at the end of February. The total amount sent was \$13,000.00. The Endowment will provide the NCSML with funds for the acquisition of Slovak materials as well as Slovak programs and exhibits. Future donations to this Endowment can be sent directly to the NCSML at 1400 Inspiration Place SW, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52404. Make checks payable to "The NCSML" – with a notation in the left hand corner: SASW endowment.

The SASW is planning future fundraising activities in order to keep adding to the Slovak Endowment at the NCSML.



## Slovakia@30 Launches with Presentation by Ambassador Javorčík

Slovakia@30, a four-part lecture series commemorating the 30th anniversary of Slovak independence, launched on January 18, 2023, with a presentation by H.E. Radovan Javorčík, Slovak ambassador to the United States, entitled "30 Years of Slovak Foreign Policy."

The series was conceived by Helen Fedor, SASW program chair, and is a collaborative project of SASW, Friends of Slovakia (FOS), and the Slovak Embassy in Washington.

Dr. Martina Hrvolová, vice chair of FOS, moderated the session, which included a lively question-and-answer period following the presentation. The in-person event at the Slovak embassy was also broadcast as an Internet live stream for participants in the United States, Slovakia, and elsewhere in Europe.

For most of the first decade of Slovak independence, the primary goal was to create new state institutions, including a central bank and Slovak currency, a competent civil administration, a general staff for the military, and a professional diplomatic service. Although separation from the Czechs was entirely peaceful, "We started as a country that had no identity," Ambassador Javorčík said. And while seeking membership in NATO and the European Union was an explicit goal from the beginning, domestic political crises led to Slovakia's exclusion in the first round of NATO and EU enlargement. Watching the Czech Republic – but not Slovakia – be admitted to NATO in 1999 "was the worst professional moment of my life," the ambassador said.

Happily, the second decade of independence was a time of progress and consolidation. Slovakia became a respected member of NATO and a core member of the EU. It adopted the euro as its currency, joined the Schengen Area of open European borders, and became a member of the U.S. visa waiver program. All these developments facilitated trade and investment, and led to Slovakia being called the economic "Tiger of Europe."

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## ***Javorčík, continued.***

In the third decade, the country saw itself as an island of peace and tranquility that could ignore troubles elsewhere, “but unfortunately this was not the truth,” the ambassador continued. Populist, socialist, and nationalist movements grew in strength, fascists became part of the parliament, and corruption became a buzzword in Slovakia, he said. And so, while this was the decade in which Slovakia elected its first president who had not been a member of the Communist Party, and its first female president, it was also the decade that witnessed the brutal murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, the weaponization by Russia of oil and gas deliveries, and the Russian invasion of Slovakia’s friendly neighbor Ukraine.

Slovakia thus finds itself at a time of soul searching as the fourth decade of independence begins. Fortunately, its membership in the EU encourages the modernization of the economy, education, digitalization, and climate policy – all things that are also dear to American hearts. “I hope this decade will be brighter than all the others,” Ambassador Javorčík concluded.

**By Thomas Skladony**

## **Second Lecture in Slovakia@30 Series Reviews 30 Years of Slovak Politics**

The second installment of the Slovakia@30 lecture series commemorating the 30th anniversary of Slovak independence was held at the Slovak Embassy in Washington D.C., and online, on February 23, 2023. The Series is a collaborative project between SASW, FOS, and the Slovak Embassy in Washington.

The focus of the talk was “30 years of Slovak Domestic Politics” and addressing the topic was arguably the foremost American expert on the Slovak political scene, Kevin Deegan-Krause, Professor of Political Science at Wayne State University, in Detroit. The program was moderated by SASW President Georgene Chastain, following an introduction by Stanislava Buchtová, Slovak Embassy Cultural Attaché, and remarks by the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic, Radovan Javorčík.

Prof. Deegan-Krause opened the talk with some personal background, describing how a non-Slovak became fascinated by his experiences in Slovakia during graduate school and proceeded to make the country’s political developments a major focus of his career. A well-known expert among the Slovak-interest community, Deegan-Krause’s research focuses on political parties and democracy in Europe, with emphasis on Europe’s newer democracies and its newer parties. His newest book, co-authored with Dr. Timothy Haughton of the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, is *The New Party Challenge: Changing Cycles of Party Birth and Death in Central Europe and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

A hallmark of Prof. Deegan-Krause’s lectures is his creative use of graphical presentation to illustrate complicated analyses. He suggested ‘four shapes’ that characterize the development of Slovak politics. The shapes suggest much variation in how various political parties perform (statistically) over time, Slovak political parties still seem to be aiming toward democracy.

*Continued on next page*

## **Politics, continued**

He then discussed how parties might be classified across traditional categories, in particular, the political and economic left/right spectrums. In Slovak politics more recently, a third category (representing 'experienced' parties that are tainted by corruption) vs. new (or 'clean') parties has become an important factor, suggesting a 'three-dimensional shape' to characterizing Slovak politics currently.

Prof. Deegan-Krause then answered questions posed by moderator Chastain and the online audience. Again, using his graphical tools, Deegan-Krause introduced a colorful, detailed chart showing the vote share, rise, and fall of Slovakia's many political parties over the past 30 years. An important point is that Slovak political parties, irrespective of whether they survive or eventually disappear, seem to be centered on one key figure or leader, and they do not tend to consolidate into more internally complex entities. It is hard to say whether this is a characteristic of a less mature democracy, or one that is more functionally pluralistic. If it is the latter, this could help explain the resilience of Slovak democracy in contrast to more populist, consolidated parties, such as those seen in Hungary or Poland.

Turning to the more recent political scene, Deegan-Krause analyzed the 2020 parliamentary election and how the make-up of the government might change, given Slovakia's recent political environment, which has resulted in early elections scheduled for late September 2023. Basing his analysis on recent polling results (which, of course, are likely to change markedly before September), he presented a range of possible scenarios for the party coalitions that might be able to form a majority government. Despite the current uncertainties, in summarizing his long view of Slovak politics, he expressed optimism for Slovakia's continued democratic development.

**By Ken Bombara**



**Prof. Deegan-Krause speaks on "30 Years of Slovak Domestic Politics."**



**Georgene Chastain, SASW President; Prof. Kevin Deegan-Krause; Ken Bombara, Chairman, Friends of Slovakia.**

## Soup's On! SASW Hosts Second Annual Soup Competition

On Saturday, March 18, SASW members and friends came together for food and fun at the second annual Slovak Souper Bowl.

Competitors were asked to bring a soup to share, and all attendees were able to vote for their favorite. Helen Fedor was crowned the winner with her sour potato soup and took home the coveted engraved wooden trophy spoon, pictured at right.

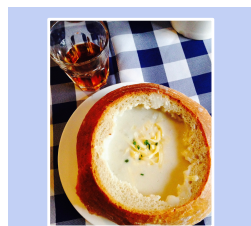
Soup wasn't the only dish on the menu—guests also enjoyed a variety of sides and desserts, as well as shots of *slivovica* and Tatra Tea.



**Helen Fedor poses with her trophy spoon.**

## Hungry for More? The SASW Cookbook is Available Now!

Don't miss your chance to bring our favorite Slovak recipes into your own kitchen. We hope these recipes transport you back to your baba's kitchen... and maybe inspire you to try some new spins on old classics.



**Dobru Chut!**



Cookbooks are \$20 each for local pick-up (\$25 each to ship).

To place your SASW Cookbook order, [fill out this short online form](#).

## SASW Advanced Conversation Group Moves to a New Day

Have you maybe thought of dropping in on SASW's online Advanced Slovak Conversation Group, but Thursday evenings just don't fit your schedule? Then we have good news for you! The group is moving its meetings to every other Monday evening, starting April 24. For now, we'll keep our meeting time of 7:45pm ET, but can adjust it depending on the needs of our participants.

The group meets every other week to chat *po slovensky*, on a theme, or about whatever catches our fancy. While there's no teaching per se, questions are always welcome and help is readily offered. No tests, no pressure! And occasionally, the local participants (we have folks in other states, as well) get together in person for lunch and maybe a beer.

All are welcome at our sessions, even if you can't make it on a regular basis. Language is very much a use-it-or-lose-it skill, so our goal is to keep the language alive, and ourselves "in practice." If interested, please send an email to [hfedor@dcslovaks.org](mailto:hfedor@dcslovaks.org) and we'll add you to the mailing list for meeting reminders (and links).

## SASW Welcomes New Board Member Marlene Yencho

Marlene Yencho joined the SASW Board in February. Her Slovak heritage extends to her great-grandparents, who were part of the mass immigration movement from Europe in the early twentieth century, coming from villages in what is now Eastern Slovakia near the Ukrainian border. Marlene's family moved back to what was then Czechoslovakia after WWI, and most of the children moved back one-by-one over the next 30 years. Working in the coal mines of Washington County Pennsylvania, her family's journey was similar to so many of the SASW members. Like many Slovaks in the US, they worked hard, served in the military, purchased homes, and sent their children to school, with many earning university degrees. Marlene maintained a strong desire to know, understand and appreciate what it is like to be Slovak and read many books, attended lectures, and wishes to integrate with the local Slovak community and help others in their discovery of our rich past, present, and future.



Her career in technology has allowed her to live, work, and volunteer abroad as well as in several cities in the US. While living in Atlanta, Marlene joined the Friends of Brazil, specifically working with its sister city Recife to host guest speakers and raise money for the program. As an avid runner, she used her familiarity with professional athletics to work with elite runners competing in the New York Marathon, LA Marathon, the Cherry Blossom Ten Mile, the US Olympic trials, and more. Marlene is foremost a Software Engineer and develops corporate-wide applications. She has managed technical programs and projects and led many development efforts. In joining the SASW Board, she aims to offer her energy in contributing to the success of the organization by providing valuable content and opportunities to the membership, grow our skills, and break new ground.

## You're Invited! SASW and FOS to Host Picnic on May 21

Join us and the Friends of Slovakia for our picnic on Sunday, May 21, from 3:00 to 7:00 p.m. The picnic will take place at the Knights of Columbus in Arlington, Virginia at 5115 Little Falls Road, Arlington VA 22207. Parking is available on the premises.

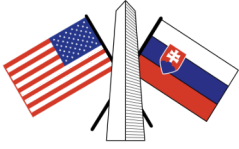
SASW and FOS will provide an assortment of grilled sausages and chicken, a keg of beer, and all necessary picnic supplies (plates, cups, cutlery, napkins). Please bring your favorite picnic side dish or dessert to share. [Use our sign-up sheet](#) to let us know what you plan to bring.

The cost for the picnic is \$15 per person (age 14 and older). Children younger than 14 are free. Pay at the entrance with cash, check, or Venmo. We cannot accept credit card payments.

The facility has a large number of picnic tables, but you may also want to bring folding lawn chairs for added convenience.

This picnic is an all-volunteer effort. The host committee is happy to hear from anyone who is able to help with setup, food preparation and serving, or cleanup. Please write to Marta Szotakova Galysh at [mszotakova@dcslovaks.org](mailto:mszotakova@dcslovaks.org) if interested in volunteering.

**Please R.S.V.P. here so we may plan appropriately: [rsvp@dcslovaks.org](mailto:rsvp@dcslovaks.org)**



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OF WASHINGTON D.C.

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

New membership or 2023 renewal runs through 12/31/2023. Contributions and memberships are tax deductible.

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

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

Lifetime membership (\$250) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Tax-deductible donation (optional):**

City University Scholarship Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SASW General Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NCSML Endowment \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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