

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

June 2018

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2018 Slovakia Anniversary Year Celebrations Continue; Pittsburgh Agreement Celebrated

The year 2018 is a special anniversary year for Slovakia, with celebrations commemorating the events of 100, 50, and 25 years ago. The major commemorative event, a gala reception, was held on May 31 in Pittsburgh, at the Heinz History Center; it was organized by the Slovak and Czech honorary consuls and the embassies of both countries. Nearly 300 attendees and guests heard from local officials and Czech and Slovak government officials commemorating and interpreting the event that took place 100 years ago in downtown Pittsburgh. There, Prof. T.G. Masaryk met with representatives of the Slovak- and Czech-American communities to endorse an agreement that Slovaks and Czechs would support the formation of an independent republic following the end of World War I and the dissolution of the Hapsburg Empire. From this 'Pittsburgh Agreement' and a number of other key events, the nation of Czecho-Slovakia (or Czechoslovakia) emerged. The resulting nation experienced both a glorious and torturous path within Europe throughout the middle of the 20th century (1918-1992).

The event was emceed by well-known Pittsburgh public TV personality and Slovak- American, Rick Sebak. The national anthems of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the U.S. were sung by local Czech and Slovak young people's groups, and Bishop David Zubik of the Diocese of Pittsburgh gave the invocation. Local officials, including Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto welcomed the attendees, and spoke of the influence that Czech and Slovak immigrants had on the development of Pittsburgh and the United States. Honorary consuls Joseph Senko (Slovak) and Carol Hochman (Czech) then introduced the guests from the Czech and Slovak governments. The ambassadors of each country, Peter Kmec (Slovakia) and Hynek Kmonicek (Czech Republic) then spoke, with Amb. Kmonicek noting that despite the 'Velvet Divorce,' Czechs and Slovaks can never be foreigners to each other. Government officials followed, with Miluse Horska, Vice President of the Senate of the Czech Parliament, speaking about the significance of the Pittsburgh Agreement for the history of Czechoslovakia. Next, Slovak government officials spoke: Katarina Csefalvayova, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, and Lukas Parizek, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. Both echoed comments about the significance of the Pittsburgh Agreement for the development of the Slovak nation. Ms. Csefalvayova in particular, looked to the future and spoke of the need for continuing vigilance in the face of current threats to democratic values.

Closing the event was a wreath-laying ceremony at a display of plaques honoring Prof. Masaryk and Woodrow Wilson that was shown by live video, and a benediction by Bishop Zubik. The attendees then enjoyed interacting, while also viewing an exhibit of panels entitled, "Czechs and Slovaks on Their Difficult Road to Peace and Independence."
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President's Message

Dear Members:

I am very pleased to announce that, thanks to your generosity, the SASW has contributed \$7,500 (ten \$750 scholarships) to the students of VSM/City University in Slovakia. This is the largest total grant in the history of the scholarship program, surpassing our previous largest donation of \$5,250, given in 2017. We plan to hold another fundraiser at Bistro Bohem this fall. The date for this event should be announced by late summer.

Picnic planning is underway, so please hold the date of **Saturday, September 15** for the SASW picnic. The exact time and location are TBD, so those details will be forthcoming later this summer as well. We are nearly half-way through our 2018 Speakers' Series with the "Borders on the Move" event coming up on **Friday, June 15**. Our next three speakers will cover the important years of 1938, 1918, and 1848. In case you are unable to attend these future talks, you will be able to view them on our new YouTube channel. Search for "**DCSlovak Videos**" to find our channel. Please bear with us as we improve our videography, and share this channel with your family and friends.

Brian Belensky

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Earlier that same day a symposium, focusing on the historical background of the Pittsburgh Agreement, was held at the University of Pittsburgh. Speakers included: Prof. Milada Polisenka, of Anglo-American University, Prague; Mgr. Matej Hanula, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava; and Dr. Hugh L. Agnew of George Washington University. Among the topics discussed were the roots of the "centralists vs. autonomists" debate that involved Slovakia, and that eventually led to the Velvet Divorce in 1993.

Regarding the Pittsburgh Agreement, it should also be noted that on April 15, the Slovak League of America, together with the NY-NJ fraternal community, held a commemorative luncheon in New York City. The Slovak League, founded in 1907, played a major role in Slovak-Americans participation in the events surrounding the Pittsburgh Agreement. .

Immediately following the commemorative events in Pittsburgh, another symposium took place in Washington on June 1 and 2, at the Slovak Embassy. The Wilsonian Club, along with the Washington branch of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU-Washington) and a number of embassy sponsors, commemorated the events of 1918 at the two-day "Rebirth of Europe" conference. This symposium had a broader focus on the implications of the Paris Agreement of 1919 that led to the restructuring of Central and Eastern Europe after World War I. The history and implications of the formation of Czechoslovakia was a key topic discussed by several speakers at this symposium as well.

Earlier Events

Prior to those just discussed, a number of 2018 events were held in the Washington area. The Slovak Embassy kicked off the year's celebrations with a special reception on January 19, in the ornate Members' Room of the Library of Congress, on Capitol Hill. The focus of the reception was the 25th anniversary of Slovakia's independence, when it split from the former Czechoslovakia in 1993, and its remarkable achievements, in terms of integration with Europe and transatlantic institutions, as well as strong bilateral relations with the U.S. under the theme, "Together for Freedom and Democracy."

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Next Event in the SASW Speakers' Series* Celebrating the Anniversaries of the 8's

"Borders on the Move: a Look at Southern Slovakia's Tumultuous 20th Century"

A talk by Prof. Leslie M. Waters

Friday, June 15, 6:30 pm

At the Slovak Embassy, 3523 International Court NW, Washington DC 20008

Admission is free but RSVP required at rsvp@dcslovaks.org

In 1938, Germany's annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland marked the beginning of the First Republic's dismemberment. This act overshadowed another important event of that year that affected Slovakia more directly: the First Vienna Arbitration, which transferred the territory of southern Slovakia to Hungary, which had controlled the area prior to 1918. In 1945, this transfer was reversed, as part of post-World War II Allied negotiations, leading to the Slovak-Hungarian population exchange of 1946-47.

In both cases, the local populations were forced to negotiate radically different political regimes and social contexts from what had come before. When these changes of sovereignty took place, citizenship, laws, currency, bureaucrats, and even street names transformed literally overnight. How did the territory's frequent changes in sovereignty affect the local population? Why have so many different states wanted to control this area? What makes it unique? These questions and more will be addressed in this talk.

Leslie M. Waters is assistant professor of history at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia. Her work focuses on Central and Eastern European borderlands, a topic she became interested in while living in two Slovak border towns, Čadca and Komárno. She is a former Fulbright fellow to Hungary and Slovakia, and is currently working on a book manuscript about border changes and forced migrations in southern Slovakia in the mid-20th century.

Also mark your calendar for these upcoming events !

September 29th - "The American Formation of Czecho-Slovakia: The Cleveland Agreement and the Pittsburgh Pact" - Prof. Gregory Ference (Salisbury University). (location TBD)

October 20th - "1848: Slovaks between Imperial Vienna and Antagonistic Budapest" - Prof. Martin Votruba (University of Pittsburgh). (at the Slovak Embassy; also SASW annual meeting)

***This year's Speakers' Series events are co-sponsored by Friends of Slovakia**

(from p.2) At the same time, the events that led to the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, following World War I, were commemorated, along with the spirit of freedom and democracy displayed during the 'Prague Spring' of 1968, consistent with the 25-50-100 anniversary theme of 2018.

Slovak Ambassador Peter Kmec led the celebration and spoke of Slovakia's struggles and achievements on the road to independence. He acknowledged the support of a number of American individuals and organizations, including our own SASW, the Slovak fraternal organizations, Friends of Slovakia, the Slovak League and many others. Also giving remarks at the event were the co-chairs of the Congressional Slovak Caucus, Rod Blum (R-Iowa) and Peter Visclosky (D-IN). In addition, remarks were provided on behalf of the U.S. State Department by Matthew A. Palmer, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.

On April 21, the SASW kicked-off its commemoration of the 'Anniversaries of the 8's,' organized under the direction of Helen Fedor, with the first of a series of lectures co-sponsored with Friends of Slovakia. Dr. Carol Skalnik Leff, of the University of Illinois, shared her insights about the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968 and the role of Czech-Slovak institutional relations. She argued that the federalization that survived the Prague Spring had an impact in 1989, and subsequently in the Velvet Divorce. Dr. Leff also touched on the roles of Dubček, Husak and Bilak in the failure of the "socialism with a human face" policy, and speculated on whether any substantial reform effort would have been tolerated by the Soviets.

The next lecture in the series, focusing on the events of 1988-93, took place on May 4, at the Slovak Embassy, and featured former U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Ted Russell and Prof. James Krapfl of McGill University, Montreal. Amb. Russell discussed his experiences in Czechoslovakia leading up to the Velvet Divorce, and Prof. Krapfl presented his academic examination of the Velvet Revolution and Velvet Divorce.

Amb. Russell reviewed his experiences as Deputy Chief of Mission in Czechoslovakia during and after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, and then as the first U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia after the 1993 Velvet Divorce. He described the role of U.S. diplomacy during these turning points in Czech and Slovak history, and the U.S. Embassy's interaction with Czech and Slovak leaders, including Václav Havel and Vladimír Mečiar. Amb. Russell emphasized how the communist government in Czechoslovakia, which lacked public credibility, and the promise of Red Army support, simply dissolved in the face of growing, massive demonstrations beginning November 17, 1989. He then described the bumps in the road toward democratization during Mečiar's leadership of newly independent Slovakia after the 1993 Velvet Divorce. He underscored how the popular vision of rejoining Western democratic institutions, including the EU and NATO, helped buffer some of Mečiar's autocratic tendencies and opened the way to successful reform efforts once Mečiar left office in 1998.

Prof. James Krapfl then discussed the Slovak transition. He pointed out that most studies of revolutions ignore their most important actors: the citizens, without whom a democratic system of government cannot (by definition) be created. He explained how citizens across Slovakia took myriad concrete steps in 1989 and the early 1990s to create a democratic political culture. He pointed out the social, geographic, and temporal patterns in the revolutionary process, explaining how and why the joyous sense of unity that characterized 1989 gave way to frustration, factionalism, and in some quarters, despair—although never to the point of Slovak citizens becoming incapable of concerted action for the sake of the public good. He described how the civil society forged in the Slovak revolution of 1989 has proved remarkably resilient, enabling the country to overcome repeated crises since becoming independent 25 years ago, and setting it apart from its neighbors.

Events will continue through the remainder of the year. Several events sponsored by SASW are listed on page 3. For other upcoming events, be sure you are on the dcslovaks email list, check the SASW website, or trawl the Internet on your own.

SASW News and Notes

V4 Film Series -- The Embassy of the Slovak Republic cordially invites you to the V4 Film Series' Slovak film "Steam on the River" (Para nad riekou), the story of three extraordinary jazzmen who came to the West from the former Czechoslovakia. The film will be screened **on Tuesday, June 19, at 6:00 pm**, at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic, 3523 International Court, NW, Washington, DC. Please note: **RSVP REQUIRED** by June 18 at <rsvp@washington.sk> or call (202) 237-1054.

CZ & SK Freedom Lecture -- This prestigious annual lecture is planned for **Friday, November 16**, at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, in the Reagan Building, downtown Washington. The event is jointly sponsored by Friends of Slovakia (FOS) and American Friends of the Czech Republic (AFoCR), and this year will feature former Slovak Prime Minister **Mikuláš Dzurinda**. It promises to be a special event in this multiple anniversary year. Dzurinda was a key architect of the post-Mečiar reforms that spurred Slovakia's economic success and fully integrated it into Western institutions. Details should be available later this summer, so please check the FOS website at <www.friendsofslovakia.org>.

Peter Kmec farewell -- It is expected that Slovak Ambassador Peter Kmec will end his long-tenure in Washington by this fall. In anticipation of busy summer schedules, an informal farewell reception, sponsored by Friends of Slovakia, was held on May 19, at the home of FOS Treasurer and SASW Member, Eva S. Jenkins and her husband Robert. The event was attended by approximately 40+ guests including representatives of SASW and other local Slovak/Czech organizations. There may be a future farewell event but we have no information or details at this time.

New Book Published -- We learned of a newly published book entitled *Slovakia: The Legend of the Linden*, by Slovak authors Zuzana Palovic and Gabriela Bereghazyova. The book aims to present Slovak history in an accessible form, invoking the legend of the linden tree and containing many colorful illustrations. The authors were recently in Washington for the "Rebirth of Europe" conference, and also presented the book at an event sponsored by the Slovak American Cultural Center in Linden, NJ, on June 10. The book is available on Amazon.com --- a good opportunity to use Amazon Smile to benefit SASW (!).

Uprising in Slovakia in Early 2018 -- While we celebrate the anniversary year of 2018 and the evolution of Slovak history over the past 100 years, it is important to note the significance of current social and political events in Slovakia during the first half of 2018, particularly, the events that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico and other government officials.

The incident spurring the popular uprising against the Fico government occurred in late February when a young journalist, Jan Kuciak, and his fiancée were found murdered. Kuciak was an investigative journalist who had been uncovering a tangled web of business dealings among Slovak government officials, local tycoons, and the Italian mafia. The journalist had found that various figures had links to Fico himself. While corruption is a long-standing concern in Slovakia, the murders touched a nerve that sent thousands of Slovak citizens throughout the country into the streets calling for investigation of the crime and for government change. These demonstrations, probably the most significant since those of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, led to PM Fico's resignation, but without a call for new elections. The ruling coalition maintained control of the government with the appointment of a new Prime Minister, Peter Pellegrini, and a number of other officials. These events led to Slovakia receiving coverage in major news sources throughout the U.S. in February-April. Clearly, these events will have an impact on Slovak politics going forward that is unclear at this time. Presidential elections will occur in 2019, without President Kiska running for re-election. Our hope is that the enhanced awareness of Slovak citizens will move the country forward and deepen its commitment to democratic principles.

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

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Individual membership (\$25/year) \$ _____
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City University Scholarship Fund \$ _____
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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**

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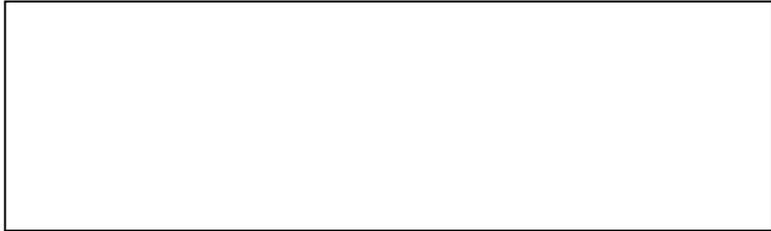
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