

SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

July 2019

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100th Anniversary of Death of Štefánik Commemorated with Lecture on His Role in the Founding of Czecho-Slovakia

This year, 2019, represents the 100th anniversary of the death of one of the most important figures in the history of Slovakia, Milan Rastislav Štefánik. On May 4, the anniversary was commemorated with a talk by researcher Kevin J. McNamara of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, who discussed “Six Events that Made Milan Štefánik a Founding Father of Czecho-Slovakia.” The talk kicked-off the 16th year of the Slovak American Society of Washington, DC (SASW) ‘Speakers’ Series’ under the direction of SASW board member Helen Fedor. The talk was jointly sponsored with Friends of Slovakia, and was held at Arlington Central Library in Virginia.

McNamara’s talk was based in part on the research for his book, *The Dreams of a Great Small Nation*, which described the role that the Czecho-Slovak Legion played in the events of World War I and the subsequent creation of an independent Czecho-Slovakia out of the dissolved Hapsburg Empire. The material McNamara compiled on Štefánik was largely edited out of the published book, but he thought that Štefánik’s role was so important that it deserves greater exposure, particularly as published research on Štefánik is rather limited in English.

McNamara detailed six events involving Štefánik that he thought were important to the founding of Czecho-Slovakia. Briefly, these were: 1) The fact that one of Europe’s best known Slovaks joined the Czecho-Slovak independence movement provided it with credibility, because the movement’s leader, Tomáš G. Masaryk, was half-Slovak and hailed from Prague, and his other chief aide, Edvard Beneš, was Czech; 2) Štefánik arranged for Masaryk to meet with French Premier Aristide Briand, who subsequently issued a public expression of sympathy for the Czecho-Slovak cause; 3) Štefánik convinced Russia to support the cause by allowing Czech and Slovak veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army, who were held in Russia as POWs, to join the Allied cause by fighting for France on the Western Front. After the Tsar was overthrown, these troops became the Czecho-Slovak Legion; 4) Štefánik traveled to the U.S. to garner Slovak-American support, and convinced former U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt to support the Czecho-Slovak independence movement; 5) Štefánik represented Czechs and Slovaks at the Congress of Oppressed Minorities in Rome and garnered further support, particularly from Italy and France, for the independence movement. Subsequently, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s secretary of state, Robert Lansing, made a statement of sympathy for the Czecho-Slovak cause; and 6) After Czecho-Slovak independence was declared on October 28, 1918, in Prague, Štefánik, although ill, traveled to Siberia to raise the morale of the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires and facilitate their departure from Russia.

Once the Czecho-Slovak state was established, Štefánik was made Minister of War, but subsequently became caught up in its internal politics and saw his role diminished. Venturing home by way of Italy after the war, Štefánik planned to return to Bratislava first. He arranged to fly an Italian airplane, but as he approached the Bratislava airport on May 4, 1919, his plane crashed and he was killed, along with two Italian passengers. He was age 39. McNamara noted that had Štefánik lived, the course of Czecho-Slovakia, and the role of Slovaks in the new nation, would likely have followed a different path. On the 100th anniversary of his death, Štefánik is still much beloved and venerated by the Slovak nation.

For more information about these historic figures and dramatic events, visit www.kevinjmcnamara.com.

President's Message

I want to thank our members who contributed generously to the City University scholarship fund this past year. We raised money for five \$750 scholarships to support Slovak students in financial need at City University in Slovakia. The board also wants to give special thanks to Bistro Bohem for hosting our fundraising event last November.

It has come to the board's attention that some members have not been regularly receiving emails from the society. If you feel you have been missing communications, please send an email to membership@dcsllovaks.org. If you are not currently on our email list, consider providing us an address so you can receive timely notices of our upcoming events.

If you are traveling to Slovakia this summer or sometime in the future, please consider sharing the story of your trip in this newsletter.

The SASW has recently created lapel pins for our members so that you can show your pride in being a member and help promote our organization. Details will be announced soon on how the pins will be distributed.

Please save the dates of **Saturday, September 14** (rain date Saturday, September 21), and **Sunday, December 8**, for our picnic and Svätý Mikuláš party. Details about these upcoming events will be sent out in coming weeks. Enjoy your summer and see you soon at one of our events!

Brian Belensky

Slovak 'Souper' Bowl I

On Saturday, March 9, SASW hosted our first Slovak Souper Bowl party and social evening at the home of Marcel Lorincz and Renee Bartoli. Seventeen guests attended and judged five Slovak soups prepared by the competitors: two versions of Caraway Seed Soup, *Kapustnica* (a sauerkraut soup traditionally served on Christmas Eve), Lentil Soup, and Split Pea Soup. To round out the delicious evening, there was European-style bread and butter to wash down the soups, and appetizers brought by the guests.

The winner of the laser-engraved wooden-spoon trophy was Kathryn Tatko. She made *Kapustnica* from a recipe given out many years ago by Eva Kellerová, wife of Branislav Lichardus, the first Slovak ambassador to the U.S.

Once the ballots had been counted, some of the guests sat down to play a traditional board game, known by its Czech name of Človeče Nezlob Sa [Hey guy, don't get mad]. This particular game board and playing pieces were made in the U.S., in the early 1950s, by a Slovak immigrant who made the set for his son. A fun and relaxing time was had by all.

SASW News and Notes:

Slovak Conversation Groups – Just a reminder that SASW has organized groups for informal conversation in the Slovak language. The groups are open to all, irrespective of level of language expertise. The groups meet in DC, Reston, and Arlington (Ballston), right next to Metro stops. This month meetings are planned for Reston on July 20th and for Arlington on July 25th. For more details check out the SASW website < www.dcslovaks.org > or email info@dcsllovaks.org. Email updates are sent regularly, so make sure you are on the SASW email list.

Jednota Mass – Looking ahead to fall, local Jednota Branch 856 has scheduled its annual Mass honoring the Slovak Chapel of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, in Washington, DC. The Mass is planned for September 15, at 11:30am, in the Crypt Church. All are welcome. For more information, call Marion Mistrik at (301) 654-5638, or Katherine Nowatkowski at (919) 651-0363.

EU Open House – On May 11, the annual European Union Open House took place, and Slovakia celebrated its 15th year as a member of the EU. The popular and well attended event featured performances by Bob Rychlik on the *fujara*, by the eclectic Slovak folk ensemble Silband, and by the childrens' folk ensembles Sokolik and Limboráčik. There were samples of Slovak food, wine, beer, and vodka, along with information about Slovakia. Several SASW members helped out as volunteers.

Bridget Brink Confirmed as Next U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia

In March, the White House announced that President Trump had nominated Bridget Brink, a career foreign service diplomat, to serve as the next ambassador to Slovakia. She was confirmed by the Senate on May 23 by voice vote, and will replace Adam Sterling, another career diplomat, who has served in Bratislava since 2016. Ms. Brink is originally from Michigan and holds two masters' degrees from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Brink is a highly distinguished diplomat who has represented the U.S. in a number of countries, including Georgia, Uzbekistan, Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey. She also had an important policymaking role in Washington, DC, serving as a deputy-assistant secretary in the State Department's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs.

Slovak Officials Visit Washington

This spring saw a focus on U.S.-Slovak relations, with an exchange of visits by key officials, including visits to Washington by the Slovak prime minister and foreign minister. The Washington visits were presaged by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Bratislava on February 12, as part of a five-day trip to several European capitals. While in the Slovak capital, Secretary Pompeo met with President Andrej Kiska, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, and Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák to discuss the U.S.-Slovak security relationship.

In early April, FM Lajčák came to Washington to meet with other NATO foreign ministers to commemorate the alliance's 70th anniversary. During the visit to Washington, Lajčák also had meetings with a number of officials, and participated in laying a wreath in commemoration of the 130th anniversary of the birth of prominent Slovak diplomat, Štefan Osuský, whose burial site is in Georgetown's Oak Hill Cemetery. Then, in early May, Slovak PM Pellegrini came to Washington for a meeting at the White House with President Trump. At the May 3 meeting, PM Pellegrini and President Trump discussed "recent, positive gains in bilateral security cooperation, as well as our shared concerns on cyber threats and the importance of energy security," according to a White House press release. A press opportunity with both of the leaders received widespread coverage in media outlets. While in Washington, the prime minister also met with a number of U.S. government officials and U.S. investors in Slovakia, visited the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, all underscoring the deepening relationship between the U.S. and Slovakia.

At both the Osuský wreath-laying with FM Lajčák, and at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier wreath-laying with PM Pellegrini, SASW was represented by President Brian Belensky, who attended along with several board members of Friends of Slovakia and others. Slovak Ambassador Ivan Korčok also participated in the ceremonies.

Čaputová Elected Slovak President; EU Elections Held

The Slovak political scene saw some important developments in the first half of 2019, with elections in March for a new president, and in May for the European Parliament. Incumbent President Andrej Kiska had chosen not to run for a second term.

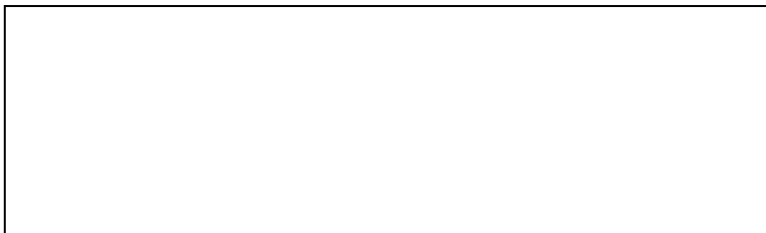
On March 16, the first round of the presidential election was held, followed by a run-off two weeks later, on March 30, between the top two vote-getters in the first round. Zuzana Čaputová, of the newly formed Progressive Slovakia party, finished ahead of Maroš Šefčovič, Vice President of the European Commission for the Energy Union, who was the next top vote-getter in the first round. Šefčovič was running as an independent, but with the support of the lead party in the ruling coalition: Direction – Social Democracy (SMER–SD). Čaputová was elected with 58.4% of the vote to Šefčovič's 41.6%. She became the first woman to be elected to the Slovak presidency, and also Slovakia's youngest-ever president. She was inaugurated to a five-year term on June 15, 2019.

Čaputová's surprising political rise and victory received more than the usual media coverage the West accords a Slovak election. A lawyer who achieved renown with her advocacy of environmental issues at the local level in Pezinok, she emerged as an independent, pro-European voice, and was lauded by outlets such as the *Washington Post*, for possibly stemming the tide of nationalist populism, particularly in the central and east European region.

Subsequently, elections for the European Parliament were held throughout the European Union in late May. Slovakia is allocated 14 seats in the European Parliament; in Slovakia 31 parties were listed on the ballot. Typically, turnout for European Parliament elections is low, particularly in Slovakia. Overall, new pro-European parties have gained over the parties of the current Slovak governing coalition. The results of both elections seem to suggest that Slovakia remains solidly on the pro-European, liberal democratic path, but not without substantial support for nationalist/populist figures. How this pattern will translate to the next parliamentary election, scheduled for March 2020, remains to be seen.



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

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New membership or 2019 renewal runs through 12/31/2019.

Individual membership (\$25/year)	\$ _____
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Mail your check (made out to the Slovak American Society of Washington, DC) and this form to:

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