

# SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

## NEWSLETTER

August 2020

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### **New Slovak Government Selects Amb. Ivan Korčok as Slovak Foreign Minister**

Ivan Korčok, recently the Slovak Ambassador to the U.S., has been appointed Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic in the cabinet of the new Slovak government led by Prime Minister Igor Matovič. The February 29 parliamentary elections saw the rise of Matovič's OLaNO party, which was able to form a new governing coalition with three other parties. In the course of selecting positions in the cabinet, the SAS party (Freedom and Solidarity, headed by Richard Sulík, chose Amb. Korčok as Foreign Minister, even though he is not a member of SAS. He will serve as an independent member of the cabinet. As the new Slovak government was forming in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Minister Korčok had to quarantine for two weeks in Bratislava before he beginning his appointment. Korčok's selection as foreign minister was hailed by many in Slovakia, the EU, and the West generally, as he represents a strong pro-EU, pro-NATO, and Trans-Atlantic perspective, which is consistent with the manifesto of the new governing coalition.



Minister Korčok has had a highly distinguished diplomatic career. Prior to serving as Slovak Ambassador in Washington since 2018, his positions included serving from August 2015 as State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. He served as the Government Plenipotentiary for the Slovak Presidency on the Council of the EU between May and December 2016, and represented the Council as *ministre délégué* (minister with special responsibility) before the European Parliament. He also served in Brussels, from 2009 to 2015, as Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the EU, and as Slovak Ambassador to Germany from 2005 to 2009. Minister Korčok began his career in 1992 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he held a number of senior positions. In 2003, he served as the Head of Delegation of the Slovak Republic on Accession Talks to NATO and Member of the European Convention in Brussels.

During his relatively short tenure in Washington, Amb. Korčok was a dynamic leader on many levels. He not only represented Slovakia to the U.S. Government and the Congress, but was active in the broader foreign policy community, the Slovak-American and émigré communities, and in organizing important cultural programs. SASW, and the Slovak-American community as a whole, extend congratulations and sincere best wishes to Minister Korčok as he continues his service and mission representing the interests of Slovakia and Slovaks to the world community.

We also learned that Jozef Polakovič, who has served as the Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission, has departed to become Minister Korčok's Chief of Staff. We extend our thanks and our best wishes to him as he assumes his new role.

### **Dr. Mesko Launches His Latest Book**

On June 30, 2020, a virtual book launch was held to introduce the English language version of Dr. Z. George Mesko's memoir, *Confessions of a Refugee*. The event was co-sponsored by two New York-area Slovak organizations, the Slovak American Cultural Center (SACC) and Slovak PRO, a group of Slovak émigré professionals in the New York area. Dr. Mesko had long been affiliated with SACC during his time in New York, and has been active with the SASW since moving to the DC area. Dr. Mesko has written several books, including the original Slovak version of *Confessions of a Refugee*, which was well received in Slovakia. He subsequently undertook an English translation of the book, and found a domestic publisher. Some will remember that SASW sponsored a book talk by Dr. Mesko, on his Slovak version of the book, as part of the SASW Speakers' Series, in September 2016. A review of the book is found inside, on pg. 3.

## President's Message

Dear Members, I hope that you and your families are well.

COVID-19 has had an adverse impact on our local community. In response to this, SASW has made a contribution of \$500 to support the Capital Area Food Bank. The SASW board encourages everyone to consider helping those in need in your local community during this critical time.

The ongoing pandemic has unfortunately forced the cancellation of many of our planned events. The SASW board is exploring several video-conferencing options. We hope to announce several virtual events in the coming weeks to keep you actively engaged in our society. Fortunately though, thanks our members' generosity, we were able to support five partial scholarships, totaling \$3,750, for students at VSM/City University in Slovakia for the coming academic year.

Also, I am pleased to announce that SASW has formally pledged its support of the National Museum of the American People, an effort to establish a new federal museum in Washington, DC, to tell the story of immigrants in America. For more information on the project, please visit <https://buildnmap.com/>.

Brian Belensky, President

## SASW News and Notes

**Slovak Cookbook Update** – Here is the latest news on the SASW Cookbook Project, from the Cookbook Committee. So far, we have over 100 recipes for our cookbook, including 14 desserts, 36 entrees, and 13 soups, but we need at least 150 recipes! Is there a family recipe that has been passed down through your family that you keep meaning to write down to preserve it for the ages? We would be happy to help by putting your Slovak family recipes in our cookbook. If you would like to share a recipe (or several!), there is still time!

Please send your recipes to: [cooking@dcslovaks.org](mailto:cooking@dcslovaks.org) ; or you can send us your recipes to the attention of:  
SASW Cookbook Committee, P.O. Box 2502, Springfield, VA 22152-2502

Brief family stories (about 500-characters long) are much appreciated, and photos of the food are also a good addition.

In addition to your name and contact info, please use the following format for your recipe submission:

- Title of recipe
- Original Slovak name (if you know it)
- Recipe owner (or person recipe can be attributed to)
- Region of Slovakia, if known
- How many persons the recipe serves
- Ingredients
- Instructions, including special instructions about prep time, resting dough, equipment, etc.
- If applicable, note whether your recipe belongs to a particular holiday or time of year

SASW is compiling this recipe book to share with members, families, and friends. After printing, the cookbook will be sold as a fundraiser to provide scholarships to needy Slovak students attending the VSM/City University in Slovakia. We hope to have the cookbook ready for Christmas gift-giving, but we are running out of time! *D'akujeme a dobrú chut!*

**Matula Award Nominations Due** – In September 2019, the SASW Board approved the creation of a service award in honor of our late member, Stephen Matula, to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the Society. The criteria for this award could include board membership, committee assignments, leadership in SASW activities, support of the SASW scholarship program, going above and beyond the call of duty, and contributions to the Washington-area Slovak American community, among others. Under extraordinary circumstances, the award could be presented to a non-SASW member.

The deadline for nominations is September 1, 2020. Any current member of SASW can nominate an individual. To nominate, please send us your name, contact information (email and phone number), and the name of person you're nominating. Please give your reasons for nomination in a paragraph of about 300 words or fewer. You can email your nomination to [nominations@dcslovaks.org](mailto:nominations@dcslovaks.org) or you can download the form from the SASW website ([www.dcslovaks.org](http://www.dcslovaks.org)) and mail it to: Nominations, Slovak American Society, P.O. Box 2502, Springfield, VA 22152-2502.

**Upcoming Webinars** – The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the landscape for online communication, as many organizations are using conferencing platforms (such as Zoom) to deliver programs. This is true of Slovak-related programming as well. SACC in the NYC area, which presented the Mesko book launch, has scheduled two more events for August. On August 11, at 8pm, there will be an interactive discussion about the Summer Language Institute at the University of Pittsburgh, which offers a program on the Slovak language. On August 25, at 7pm, SACC will present a discussion about Slovak patriot M.R. Stefanik, with renowned historian Prof. Stan Kirschbaum. Here's a link: <https://slovakamericanc.com/slovakamericanc>. Another organization that has been offering interesting webinars is Global Slovakia, at <https://globalslovakia.com/>.

**Bistro Bohem Closes its Doors** – SASW learned recently that the DC Czech-themed restaurant Bistro Bohem has announced that it has closed its doors, mostly a victim of COVID times. On a number of occasions, the Bistro served as the location for SASW City Univ. scholarship fundraising events. We're sorry to see it go and wish owner Daniel Sidzina, his wife Vendula, and the Bistro staff the best for the future. A story about the closing is available on the dc.eater.com website at: <https://dc.eater.com/2020/7/14/21324102/bistro-bohem-czech-tavern-closing-shaw-coronavirus-shaw-dc>

## ***Confession of a Refugee: A Journey to the Unknown: August 21, 1968, by Z. George Mesko, M.D.***

***Reviewed by Georgene Chastain***

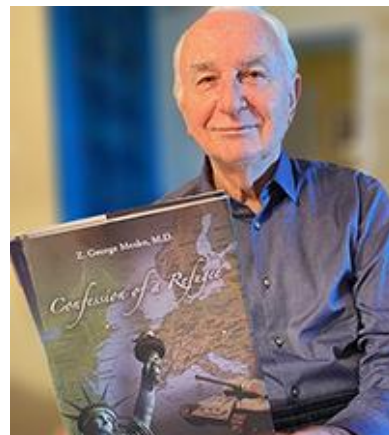
Dr. Zoltan (George) Mesko, born in Slovakia, was a specialist in Pediatric Cardiology at the Children's Hospital in Bratislava. In the summer of 1968, Dr. Mesko, his wife, and their two young children embarked on a much-needed vacation on the coast of the Adriatic Sea. When the family was about to leave for their trip home, they heard the news that the Red Army of the Warsaw Pact had invaded their home country of Czechoslovakia. Dr. Mesko and his wife did not know whether it would be better to go back to their home or flee. Never having joined the Communist Party, Dr. Mesko knew that he would not be treated well. They stayed with friends in Belgrade while deciding what to do. He had been offered a fellowship at the Children's Hospital in Tübingen, West Germany, before they had left on vacation, so he attempted to contact the doctor in West Germany who had offered him the fellowship. After an entrance visa for West Germany, and another visa to travel through Austria, was obtained, the family packed all their belongings, which were mainly vacation clothes, into their little car and drove to Tübingen. The family had become refugees from Czechoslovakia, along with about 150,000 other Czechs and Slovaks who found themselves unable to return to their country after the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Somehow, through the kindness of others, the Mesko family settled into life in West Germany. Holidays were lonely, as they missed their family and friends. Their newly furnished condo in Bratislava had to be abandoned, and was eventually taken over by the chairman of the board of the condo association, along with all the condo's furnishings.

Dr. Mesko's story continues, as he eventually travels to America together with his family, to the Children's Hospital Boston, to continue his studies and learn more about his specialty from some of the top doctors in America. The Mesko families become Americans and acclimate to the culture, and the children grow up experiencing all that a free country has to offer. Dr. Mesko advances in his specialty, and after a few years he is able to find a position with the St. Francis Hospital Heart Center in Roslyn, New York, where he teaches other young doctors. He also works with the Gift of Life Foundation, to help children from South Korea and Poland with congenital heart abnormalities, which are corrected via open heart surgery, at no cost to their families. So the refugees come full circle, from depending on the kindness of others to giving back to others who need help.

The author's voice in this memoir is fresh and hopeful. Descriptions of the many friends and colleagues whom the Mesko family met on their journey are detailed. And the many meals that the family enjoys are described in sumptuous detail. Although this book could have used a little more editing, it was a pleasure to read.

Info on ordering the book: The book is available on Amazon.com. Just enter "Z. George Mesko" in the search box. You can also order directly from the publisher, Dorrance Publishing Co., by calling 1-800-788-7654, or visiting their website at: [www.dorrancebookstore.com](http://www.dorrancebookstore.com).





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**SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC**  
**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL / APPLICATION / DONATION FORM**

New membership or 2020 renewal runs through 12/31/2020.

Individual membership (\$25/year)	\$	
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**Tax-deductible donation (optional):**

City University Scholarship Fund	\$	
SASW General Fund	\$	

Total amount enclosed: \$                                 

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