

AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Sokol West and AFoCR Dedicate New Gymnasium



Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, 11/20/15

Friday, November 20, 2015, marked a major milestone in the recovery of West, Texas. The Sokol West Gymnasium, for which ground was broken exactly one year before, was dedicated in a joyous celebration and ribbon cutting ceremony. The Sokol gym, along with a significant portion of the town, was destroyed in the April 17, 2013, explosion of the West Fertilizer Plant. Shortly after this tragedy, AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek went to West to assess the damage. Mr. Malek saw the need and committed AFoCR to help with West's recovery. AFoCR returned along with Ambassador Gandalovič to help with the planning, and rebuilding the Sokol gymnasium has been a major project of AFoCR over the past two years. AFoCR cosponsored the visit of young Czech Sokol members to the Czech Republic, which ultimately led to the sister city partnership now in place between West and the Czech town of Kunovice. AFoCR Director Fritz Duda, a Dallas real estate developer, actively assisted in the design and planning, and AFoCR lead the fundraising effort, which was kicked off with a \$200,000 grant from the government of the Czech Republic. Mr. Duda, Mr. Malek, and Czech entrepreneur Zdeněk Bakala each made gifts of \$100,000. Finally, individual AFoCR donors collectively contributed almost \$100,000.

Construction of the project began in November 2014 with a groundbreaking attended by Czech Prime Minister Sobotka and Texas Governor Rick Perry. Mr. Malek spoke about his appreciation of the importance of Sokol while growing up in Berwyn, a suburb of Chicago with strong Czech traditions, and the importance the Sokol facility was to the community in West. He noted that helping Czech communities with recovery when tragedy strikes is a key AFoCR priority.

Special guests at the dedication included Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič, current Texas Governor Greg Abbott, AFoCR directors, and leaders of the American Sokol Organization. Governor Abbott and Mary Beth Dulock, Secretary of Sokol West, cut the symbolic red ribbon to open the new gym, alongside Ambassador Gandalovič and Mr. Malek. In his remarks, Mr. Malek congratulated the city of West on its enormously successful recovery and expressed his sense of privilege that AFoCR could play a key role in the creation of the new facility. At the close of the ceremony AFoCR directors Robert Doubek and Phil Kasik unveiled a plaque acknowledging the major contributors to the project. The master of ceremonies for the dedication was Bob Podhrasky, First Vice President of American Sokol and President of Sokol Southern District.

Jean Hruby, President of American Sokol, *(cont. on page 6)*

AFoCR Transfers Woodrow Wilson Monument to City of Prague



AFoCR Director Robert Doubek and President Tom Dine present transfer documents to Prague Lord Mayor Adriana Krnáčová

In a ceremony held on October 7, 2015, at the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague, AFoCR officially turned over the monument to the City of Prague. AFoCR Director Robert Doubek, who directed the monument project, served as MC for the event. He recounted how the monument, originally established in 1928 by Americans of Czech and Slovak descent, was torn down by the German occupiers in December 1941. In 2007, AFoCR decided to rebuild it, and it was rededicated on October 5, 2011. At the ceremony the City of Prague was represented by its Lord Mayor, Adriana Krnáčová, who happens to be the first woman ever to hold that office. A great friend of the United States, Ms. Krnáčová earned a Master of Business Administration degree (MBA) from DePaul University in Chicago. Speaking for the U.S. Embassy was Deputy Chief of Mission Steven Kashkett. The culmination of the ceremony was the execution and delivery of the official Donation Agreement by AFoCR President Thomas Dine. AFoCR had retained control of the site until this year in order to add additional plaques to the Walk of Freedom, which recognizes significant donors, and to place an interpretive explanation of the importance of the role played by President Wilson in establishing the Czechoslovak state in 1918.

Annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture



Monsignor Dr. Tomáš Halík delivers Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture at Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC

The 16th Annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture was delivered on October 20, 2015, by Monsignor Dr. Tomáš Halík. A Czech Roman Catholic priest, philosopher, theologian, and scholar, Dr. Halík currently serves as Professor of Sociology at Charles University and formerly was an adviser to Czech President Václav Havel and Pope John Paul II. His talk, delivered before a packed auditorium at the prestigious Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, was titled "A Long Period of Healing: The Role of Religion in the Transition from Communism to Democracy." *(cont. on page 3)*

Letter from AFoCR President Tom Dine



*AFoCR
President Tom
Dine with Czech
Prime Minister
Bohuslav
Sobotka, Prague*

Czech Republic and Its Allies Challenged by Jihadi Terror

As 2016 commences, jihadi groups are seriously challenging countries of Europe, North America, Africa, and the Middle East. The most strenuous protagonist is the Islamic State. Over the course of the last six months, Islamic State's rage and rapacious rampages, indeed seemingly unstoppable human and material destruction in Syria and Iraq, as well as the consequent migration of victims into Europe, including the Czech Republic, have created blood-soaked images in such places as Paris, France, Ankara, Turkey, Mamako, Mali, Yola, Nigeria, Beirut, Lebanon, and Egypt's Sinai. Islamic State is trying to provoke an apocalyptic confrontation with "crusader infidels." More violence in the name of Islam is expected in the new year.

The key challenge facing the Czech Republic and its EU allies is how to conduct a successful campaign against the threat of Islamic nihilism and mass migration.

European Values, a new but already respected Prague-based think tank with strong ties to the American Friends of the Czech Republic, has issued a study on this topic entitled "The Challenge of the Islamic State." Its author is Dr. Shmuel Bar, an international scholar who has written extensively on Middle East matters and produced research papers for U.S. and Israeli government agencies. The conclusion of his 10-page paper matches that of Czech government officials and foreign policy analysts with whom AFoCR directors spoke during their October trip to Prague. The point raised in conversation after conversation and reiterated by Bar was that "current efforts to degrade the Islamic State by limited military force or to delegitimize (it) by declaring it not Islamic are not likely to bear fruit in the near future." As Bar writes, "A credible military option to defeat the Islamic State would call for decisive military capability that neither the Syrian nor the Iraqi regimes possess and the Arab coalition against (it) will not invest while the United States 'leads from behind.'" And "Russian interest...is to preserve the Syrian regime."

Bar recommends that EU and NATO member countries follow short- and long-term strategies:

- Create a coalition of those entities bordering Syria and Iraq: Jordan, Turkey, Kurdistan, parts of Lebanon, and Israel;
- Provide military, economic, and political support to Jordan and Lebanon, and demand in return operations against the Islamic State;
- Target and neutralize radical jihadi leaders;
- Hold Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan accountable for anti-western behavior of state-funded religious institutions and clerics. "Muslim regimes have the means," Bar asserts, "to impose their will on their religious establishments."
- Stop trying to reestablish failed states in the Middle East and rethink the Westphalian nation-state model that was behind the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916;
- Build a program to block Islamic and other violent groups in all countries of Europe and North America, such as training a new generation of experts in Arab culture, religion, and language, countering threats of recruitment and cyber attacks, shutting down Islamic clerics preaching hate and violence, and disrupting the flow of funds to jihadists through European banks and non-governmental organizations;
- Develop a specific toolbox for Muslim leaders to stand up to and excommunicate western Islamic radicals.

Jihadi terrorists and their victims present national security and humanitarian threats. The Czech Republic needs to join the most generous Europeans -- Germany and Sweden -- in dealing with the current refugee crisis. In a war against the Islamic State and its allies, in a situation of collapsing states and uninterrupted civil wars, a refugee policy that does not capitulate to fear and streets of blood belongs at the center of any European strategy. That is why the recommendations issued by the Prague-based non-profit European Values need to be taken seriously and executed by the Czech government and its allies in this new year.

Thomas A. Dine
President, AFoCR

Annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture *(continued from page 1)*

Dr. Halík observed that Alexander Solzhenitsyn once answered the question of what would follow Communism: a very, very long period of healing. He reflected on the transition from Communism to democracy and the important role of churches and faith-based communities in the process. Dr. Halík offered the hope that experiences of Central and Eastern Europe could be useful for "creating a biosphere of democracy" in other parts of the world. The Annual Gibian Freedom Lecture is cosponsored by AFoCR and Friends of Slovakia. AFoCR Director Phil Kasik congratulated Dr. Halík after the talk and awarded him the AFoCR Certificate of Appreciation.

Born in 1948, Dr. Halík converted to Roman Catholicism at age 18 and studied sociology and philosophy at Charles University in Prague. His doctoral graduation speech was deemed subversive by the Communist regime, so he was banned from teaching and academics. Dr. Halík worked as a psychotherapist from 1972 to 1990, but clandestinely studied theology and in August 1978 was secretly ordained as a Catholic priest in Erfurt, East Germany. In the 1980s he was active in the "underground church" and was a close associate of Cardinal František Tomášek. After the 1989 Velvet Revolution, he became an external advisor to President Havel.

Dr. Halík joined the Sociology Faculty of Charles University in 1993 and became a professor in 1997. He also heads the Religious Studies Department. He has lectured at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities and also has been the rector of Prague's Church of the Holy Savior since 1990. Pope Benedict XVI nominated him as a monsignor, an honorary prelate of the pope, in 2008.

Dr. Halík often speaks on ethical issues, such as racism, political and religious intolerance, and secularization as well as the process of European expansion and integration. In 2014 he received the coveted Templeton Prize, which honors a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery or practical works.



Michael Van Dusen, Senior Advisor to the President, Wilson Center, and Dr. Halík (photo by Lillis Werder)



AFoCR Director Phil Kasik presents Dr. Halík with an AFoCR Certificate of Appreciation (photo by Lillis Werder)

AFoCR Study Trip to Prague



View from Charles Bridge, Prague (photo by Lillis Werder)

Nineteen directors of AFoCR participated in a study mission to Prague, October 5-12, 2015, to mark the 20th anniversary of the founding of the organization.

The education tour's purpose was to update the directors about current Czech political, economic, media, and civil society realities, particularly dealing with Russian aggressiveness and influence in local politics and businesses, corruption in the arena of public policy, the Czech and European Union response to refugees fleeing from Mid-East violence, and the current state of Czech-U.S. relations. Expectations following the American presidential election in November 2016 and ways to increase U. S. presence in Central Europe were also discussed.

The AFoCR directors met privately with Czech political leaders, to include Speaker of the Parliament Jan Hamáček, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, Finance Minister Andrej Babiš, Foreign Minister Lubomír Zaorálek, Human Rights Minister Jiří Dienstbier, Jr., Deputy Defense Minister Pavel Beran, and Lord Mayor of Prague Adriana Krnáčová. Panel discussions, hosted by Česká spořitelna bank in its historic downtown facility, were presented by prominent experts in business, finance, journalism, non-governmental activism, and cultural institutions.

Grand Celebration of 150th Anniversary of American Sokol



AFoCR Directors Phil Kasik and Kristyna Driehaus at Gala Dinner, Chicago (photo by Lynda Filipello)

American Sokol celebrated its 150th anniversary this year. The organization, founded in St. Louis in 1865, celebrated the milestone with a series of events in its headquarters city of Chicago. The events culminated with a gala dinner in downtown Chicago attended by leaders of Sokol from across the nation, as well as Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič, Gail Naughton, President & CEO of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library in Cedar Rapids, and Phil Kasik, Executive Vice President of AFoCR.

U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic Andrew Schapiro sent a message congratulating Sokol on its dedication to the physical, mental, and cultural advancement of members and to the local communities served across America. Jean Hruby, President of American Sokol, spoke eloquently on the enduring nature of Sokol over these 150 years, through multiple wars and 40 years of Communism.

Sokol West and AFoCR Dedicate New Gymnasium

(photos by Lillis Werder)



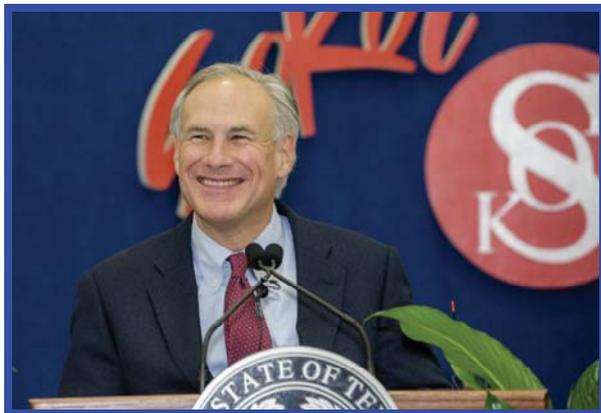
American Sokol President Jean Hruby shows the flag in West



AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek delivers remarks congratulating West and Sokol on its achievement



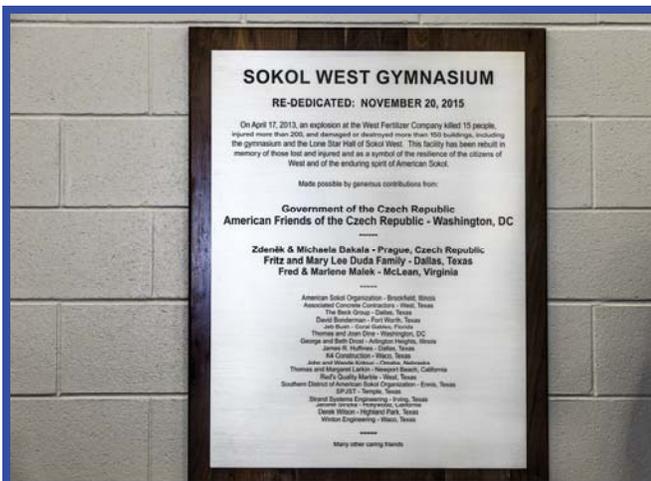
AFoCR Chairman responds to local media questions



Governor Greg Abbott helps celebrate the re-opening of Sokol West



AFoCR Director Robert Doubek with young Sokol members performing gymnastics demonstration



Sokol West Rededication Plaque – November 20, 2015



Bob Podhrasky, Jean Hruby, Marlene Malek, AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek, Directors Phil Kasik, Robert Doubek with Christine Bedoret and Ambassador Petr Gandalovič alongside Contributor Plaque at Sokol Gymnasium

AFoCR Study Tour to Prague - October 2015

(photos by Lillis Werder)



Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka with AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek at the Prime Minister's Residence



American Ambassador to the Czech Republic Andrew Schapiro with AFoCR Director Bill Cabaniss at the Ambassador's Residence



AFoCR Director Patty Stack introduces members of the Human Rights panel: Moderator Klára Gajdušková, and panelists Jakub Klepal, Šimon Pánek, and Paul Rusesabagina



Director of Václav Havel Library Michael Žantovský with AFoCR President Tom Dine and Joan Dine, Václav Havel Library



AFoCR Directors Joseph Balaz and Patty Stack with the Director of the Center on Global Economic Governance at Columbia University Jan Švejnar at the economics panel discussion



AFoCR Director Patty Stack introduces members of the Politics panel in Prague: Jiří Pehe, Daniel Anýž, Štefan Füle and Brian Whitmore



AFoCR Director Bill Cabaniss, Director Peter Bisek, Joan Dine, Czech Minister of Human Rights Jiří Dienstbier, Jr., Director Phil Kasik, and President Tom Dine



Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka greets AFoCR Director Hana Callaghan in the Prime Minister's Residence

(Cont. from page 1) spoke about the importance of this new beginning as American Sokol celebrates its 150th Anniversary Year. After the ceremony, the West High School Junior Historians demonstrated Czech traditional dances and children displayed their gymnastic skills.

On the gym's outside wall at the entryway is a marble tablet engraved the words, "Byli jsme a budem! We were and we will be!" Indeed they will.

NCSML Announces New Strategic Plan



A bold and visionary plan sets the direction for the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML) in the next five years. Approved by the Board of Trustees in April 2015, the plan's intent is to meet the museum's mission to inspire people from every background to connect to Czech and Slovak history and culture. The Five Strategic Priorities are: Focus on Human Rights, Celebrate Culture, Become Embedded in Community, Engage Families, and Enhance Performance. President and CEO Gail Naughton explains, "One of the toughest challenges organizations like ours face in today's world is staying relevant. In the United States and around the world, we are facing challenges to democratic principles, basic freedoms, and civil society. This new plan enables the NCSML to respond to these challenges by connecting the lessons of Czech and Slovak history to current issues. Our goal is to impact the future by helping create better informed Americans and better global citizens."

The NCSML will sharpen its focus to provide children and young adults with meaningful ways to learn about human rights

issues. Lesson plans and a variety of age-appropriate activities, programs, and events are being created. At the same time, the NCSML intends to be a contributor to the dialogue on human rights and contemporary issues of concern, both locally and nationally. This isn't new to the NCSML. In fact, it's one of the museum's proven strengths. Part of what the NCSML has been doing all along has addressed human rights through exhibits and programs, such as "Samizdat: The Czech Art of Resistance," now on display through April 2016. Overall, through all its programs and events, every person touched by NCSML should have an experience that promotes an understanding of his or her connection to the world and its people. Please see the NCSML web site (www.NCSML.org) which contains the full strategic plan and schedule of 2016 programs and exhibits.

Msgr. Dr. Tomáš Halík Visits Philadelphia



Dr. Halík visits Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter and staff, with Czech Republic Honorary Consul General Peter Rafaeli and Naomi Rafaeli

On Friday, October 22, 2015, Monsignor Dr. Tomáš Halík, Czech Roman Catholic priest, philosopher, theologian and scholar, made a brief visit to Philadelphia. Accompanied by Dr. Robert Řehák of the Czech Embassy, he was greeted by Honorary Consul General Peter Rafaeli and his spouse Naomi. The group was escorted throughout the visit by the Philadelphia Police Department's Dignitary Protection Unit. His Philadelphia visit included a stop at the offices of Mayor Michael Nutter, where a city delegation presented him with a Liberty Bell replica. The group proceeded to Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell where Msgr. Halík received a private tour. The final stops were Masaryk Place and the Bellevue Hotel, where T.G. Masaryk stayed in 1918.

Czech National Day at Masaryk Memorial - 10/28/15



Czech Ambassador Peter Gandalovič, Vice President of the Czech Chamber of Deputies Jaroslava Jermanová, and AFoCR President Tom Dine



Jaroslava Jermanová speaks at Czech National Day commemoration



Czech National Day commemoration ceremony

Jaromír Střížka Memorium



Jaromír Střížka
June 22, 1919 - March 13, 2015
Hollywood, CA
(photo by tributes.com)

Jaromír Střížka, a long-time supporter of AFoCR, passed away this spring. AFoCR has received a substantial bequest from his estate for projects and operating expenses and is extremely grateful for this generosity.

Mr. Střížka's life story is one of success and determination in the face of adversity. From the age of 13, he successfully engaged in sports, first representing Sokol Mělník in running various distance events and later, while studying economics at Charles University, becoming a member of Slávia Praha. In addition to the sprints, he excelled at the pole vault and was nominated by the Czechoslovak Athletic Union to compete in this event in the 1939 Olympic Games in Helsinki. Unfortunately, World War II cancelled not only the Helsinki Games, but also his sports activities and his studies. After the war, Mr. Střížka took over his father's business, operating it until 1948 and building it into a very successful import-export company with extensive international customers, particularly in Belgium and Holland.

After the Communist coup d'état in February 1948, his company was nationalized and the regime demanded that he become a state employee at a very low wage. He refused and an arrest order was issued on February 7, 1949. That night, secret police (STB) agents entered his home and proceeded to loot valuables and important documents from the safe. When Mr. Střížka himself was about to be arrested, he asked to get a sweater from an adjoining room. Once there, he escaped through a door that was unknown to the agents.

That night he reached friends who sheltered him at great peril to themselves, and an underground resistance group who specialized helped him escape across the Czech/German border that was patrolled by guards with assault rifles and trained dogs. Once in Germany he was admitted to a refugee camp. Before escaping, he had made arrangements with a long time trusted business partner in Holland to hold a payment that the man owed him. After Mr. Střížka made it to Holland, however, the man refused to pay, and Mr. Střížka had no legal recourse due to his refugee status.

So once very wealthy and now very poor, Mr. Střížka moved to the U.S. in 1953, where, in Hollywood, California, he began from scratch. With perseverance, intelligence, business skills, and very hard work, he established and built European Crafts, Inc., a musical instruments and parts wholesale company that he owned and ran until 2014.

Mr. Střížka lived a modest lifestyle, contributing generously for many years to organizations in the U.S., among them the World Wildlife Fund, the ASPCA, AFoCR and others, including in the Czech Republic. He enjoyed living in the Hollywood Hills, under the Hollywood sign, furnished with furniture that he inherited from his parents. He loved his beautifully landscaped backyard adjacent to a canyon where many tame and wild animals would frequently come to visit.

For information on AFoCR's program for gift bequests and estate planning, please consult the "donate" option from the Home page of our web site www.afocr.org

Alena "Ája" Vrzáňová Dies



Aja Vrzanova
with AFoCR
Director
Joseph Balaz
at the BBLA,
New York City,
2011

Alena "Ája" Vrzáňová, a world champion figure skater and AFoCR Advisor, passed away suddenly on July 30, 2015. Vrzáňová represented Czechoslovakia at the 1948 Winter Olympics, and in 1949 won her first World Championship title in Paris. After winning the 1950 European Championships, she won a second world title at the 1950 World Championships and then defected. After moving to the United States she performed for both the Ice Follies and the Ice Capades. In 2009, she was inducted into the World Figure Skating Hall of Fame and received the title of "Sports Legend of the Czech Republic." In 2012 she received the Czech Foreign Ministry's *Gratias Agit* award for promoting the good name of the Czech Republic abroad.

An important member of the Czech community, both in the U.S. and the Czech Republic, she was a generous supporter of AFoCR. She also was a trustee of the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (BBLA). She will be deeply missed.

Repairs to Masaryk Memorial

Since 2002, the T. G. Masaryk Memorial has stood tall in Washington, D.C., as a symbol of the longstanding and enduring relationship between the U.S. and the Czech Republic. This memorial and the Woodrow Wilson Monument in Prague together honor the U.S. and Czech leaders who were key to the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918.

Now, the iconic Masaryk Memorial needs some repairs and a bit of a facelift. The hard Washington winters have taken a toll on the statue, and the summer heat has taken a toll on the trees and other landscaping. Therefore, AFoCR, in cooperation with the Czech Government, is undertaking a project to stabilize the statue and improve the landscaping. Although it will be costly (\$15-20,000), the project should take care of current repairs and minimize the likelihood of similar issues in the future. Donations for this project would be greatly appreciated.



AFoCR Director Dick Schubert, Czech Ambassador Petr Gandalovič, Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomir Zaorálek, AFoCR Chairman Fred Malek, Director Phil Kasik, President Tom Dine, and Director Barbara Gibian, 10/1/2015 at Masaryk Memorial

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*Tomáš G. Masaryk
 Memorial in
 Washington, DC*



*Candles Lit in Memory of
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