

CZECH the NEWS

Newsletter of the Embassy of the Czech Republic

Vol. 2, 2009

Highlights of the Czech EU Presidency in Washington, DC

The Czech Embassy in Washington, DC, proudly cooperated in organizing the visit of President Barack Obama in Prague for the EU-US Heads of States Summit in April 2009. President Obama also used the opportunity of his Prague visit for bilateral meetings with Czech representatives, and for presenting his first major foreign policy speech at the Prague Castle on April 5, 2009.

Among the many Czech governmental visits to Washington, the Embassy welcomed Czech Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs Alexander Vondra and Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg in February and March 2009. During their working visits, the Ministers presented the

main priorities of the Czech EU Presidency and discussed common transatlantic interests with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other partners.

In Washington, DC, the Embassy organized meetings and briefings with representatives of all EU member states. Ambassador Petr Kolar hosted numerous working lunches and breakfasts for EU Heads of Missions and prominent U.S. guests, such as President Obama's National Security Advisor Gen. James Jones; Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Senate John Kerry; Senator and Presidential Nominee John McCain; Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano; Director of the White House's National Economic Council



Senator John Kerry talks to the Ambassadors of the 27 EU Member States during a luncheon at the Embassy of the Czech Republic.

Lawrence Summers; U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke.

Deputy Chief of Mission Jaroslav Kurfurst hosted debates on current foreign

political issues with Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried, President Obama's Senior Director for Russia Michael McFaul, Special Advisor

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International Conference on Holocaust Marks the End of the Czech EU Presidency

On June 26 – 30, 2009, Prague and Terezin hosted the Holocaust Era Assets Conference, which raised awareness of this dark chapter of European history and of social programs for Nazi victims.

The event brought together representatives of 49 countries, Czech and foreign NGOs, experts, and the media.

The gala opening of the conference on June 26, at Zofin Palace in Prague was attended by Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel, former President of the European Parliament Simone Veil, and Minister for European Affairs Stefan Fule. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright also attended the event.

On June 29, the joint statement of the Czech Presidency and the European Commission was signed at the conference. The aim was to support the activities of the Member States in Holocaust education, social care for Holocaust survivors, and care for memorial sites. On June 30, the Terezin Declaration



From left to right: Ambassador Milos Pojar, Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Conference; Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Mr. Premysl Sobotka; and Secretary Madeleine Albright

“Although the conference takes place at the very end of the Czech Presidency, it is one of its most important events. Even 64 years after the end of the worst war in human history, the Holocaust is not only a topic for history classes. I am glad that at a time of rising anti-Semitism, the European Union is ready to face this issue.”

~ Minister for European Affairs Stefan Fule

was announced in Terezín, in the presence of Prime Minister Jan Fischer. On the basis of this document, the European Shoah Legacy Institute will be established in Terezin.

According to Senator Alex-

andr Vondra, one of the initiators of the conference and moderator of Monday's plenary meeting: “The Holocaust, or Shoah, was-

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Photo courtesy of Chad Wyatt

Dear Friends,

On June 30, 2009, the Czech Republic concluded its historically first Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). It is now time to sum up and recapitulate the Czech EU Presidency that has challenged us during the times of a very turbulent, yet exciting change.

Coinciding with the appointment and confirmation of the new members of President Obama's administration, the Czech Embassy served as the extended hand of the European Union's voice that reached across the Atlantic and brought the United States closer to the 27 member states of the European Union.

During the vivid days of the Czech EU Presidency, I had the pleasure of hosting many U.S. dignitaries and members of the previous, as well as the new U.S. administration, at our Embassy. I approached them, along with my European colleagues, with one clear intention—to bring Europe and America closer together. With a vision that allows us to walk unified as the two fundamental cradles of democracy with one essential task and mission—to intensify and improve the dialogue between people that share the same values and principals of liberty, fairness, innovation, consciousness, people that fight the injustice and oppression to make our world a safer and better place.

The real highlight of the Czech EU Presidency was the EU-U.S. Summit we proudly hosted in Prague. The historic speech of President Obama at the Prague castle was not only a warm tribute to the people of the Czech Republic, but more importantly, outlined a joint vision for a better, aggression free future for all of us.

Consequently, we were faced with not merely the financial and economic crisis, but also a series of other challenges. We had to move quickly from the heat of the Gaza conflict to the cold days of the Russia/Ukraine gas crisis as well as other dramatic and unexpected events. Just like the sudden outbreak of the swine flu caught the world by surprise, domestic political turmoil in the Czech Republic was also not anticipated. Similarly to the swine flu suddenly changing its name to the H1N1 Flu, the Czech Republic changed governments. To some extent, our Presidency was like the weather here in Washington, D.C.—cold rainy mornings followed by sunny afternoons, frosty winter days displaced by beautiful cherry blossoms, concluded in a sunny, yet humid summer.

With this in mind, I can proudly thank all my colleagues from the Czech Embassy, Embassies of the EU, as well our American friends, for sailing with us on the Czech EU Presidency boat. Last, but not least, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to my wife, who provided me with excellent guidance, support and kindness that so importantly contributed to my mission.

Finally, I wish my Swedish counterpart good luck behind the captain's wheel of transatlantic affairs of the EU Presidency, and for strong, but friendly tail wind to blow right into his sails.

Warm regards,

Petr Kolar



Highlights of the Czech EU Presidency

(Continued from pg. 1)



Photo courtesy of Mary Fezako

Ambassador Kolar and Ambassadors of EU Member States meet with Secretary Janet Napolitano.

on Iran Denis Ross, among others. He also hosted weekly phone calls with the U.S. State Department and National Security Council, and the Delegation of the European Commission in Washington, DC, on all topical issues of the day.

Political Counselors of all EU Member States met at more than 25 briefings at the Czech Embassy during the Presidency, discussing and coordinating EU positions on foreign relations regarding the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, North Korea, and Latin America.

The Presidency concluded with a Czech EU Presidency Farewell Reception at the Czech Embassy on June 18, featuring the famous Czech band Czechomor who entertained more than 300 guests.

The Czech Embassy would like to express its deep gratitude and thanks to all its friends, colleagues, and supporters who helped with the historically first Czech EU Presidency. Without your support and help, the challenging and demanding task of presiding over the EU during the times of deep economic challenges would be unimaginable.

We hope that the Czech Presidency, twenty years after our Velvet Revolution in 1989, ten years after our accession to NATO in 1999 and five years after our joining the EU in 2004, highlighted again the successful path that the Czechs have taken from communist oppression to a free and democratic nation. We are proud that we could perform our EU Presidency during the time of the new U.S. administration of President Barack Obama.



Photo courtesy of Tadej Lochoska

Ambassador Kolar and Special Advisor on Iran Denis Ross



Photo courtesy of Mary Fezako

Ambassador Kolar and Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano



Photo courtesy of Mary Fezako

Ambassador Kolar and U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke



Photo courtesy of Mary Fezako

Ambassador Kolar and Director of the White House's National Economic Council Lawrence Summers



SVU Congress Held in Texas

The Czech and Slovak Society of Arts and Sciences (SVU) Congress convened at Texas A & M University on June 5–7, 2009, opened by SVU President Dr. Karel Raska, Jr. noting the central theme: *Contributions of Czech and Slovaks to the American Southwest*.

Ambassador Petr Kolar, who could not attend the event due to prior obligations concerning the Czech EU Presidency, sent warm greeting through a letter acknowledging the influence of SVU in the U.S. and around the world. In his letter he wrote:

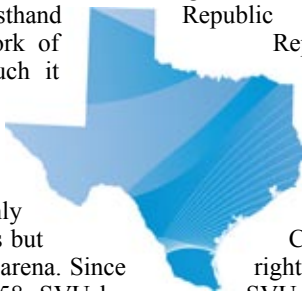
“In my travels I have witnessed firsthand the outstanding work of SVU and how much it has contributed to the promotion of Czech and Slovak scientists and artists, not only in the United States but in the international arena. Since its beginning in 1958, SVU has convened world intellectuals and offered them a forum where they can exchange ideas and share

open and intelligent dialogue.”

“Thanks to the unrelenting dedication of SVU members over the last 51 years, Czechs and Slovaks have maintained a strong presence in the international scientific and cultural community.”
~ Ambassador Kolar

“I am also very happy that for the past almost 20 years you have had a strong bond with your countries that are, once again, democratic, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic,” continued the Ambassador.

He concluded the letter citing Texas, with its 1.5 million inhabitants of Czech origin, as the right place to hold a SVU scientific gathering. Ambassador Kolar wished the participants intellectually rich and creative debates.




Left to right: Mr. Lewis White, Mr. Phil Kasik, Deputy Chief of Mission Jaroslav Kurfurst, Mr. Vladimir Eisenbruk, and Mr. Robert Doubek gather at the Masaryk Memorial in Washington, DC, before Mr. Eisenbruk continued his visit to Texas for the SVU Congress.

Photo courtesy of Nora Jankovicova

Other distinguished speakers at the opening ceremony included Mr. Vladimir Eisenbruk, Ambassador for the Czech Communities Abroad from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague; Mr. Jaroslav Panek, Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic; Mr. Raymond J. Snokhouse, Honorary Consul General of the Czech Republic for the State of Texas; and Mr. Ben M. Crouch, Executive Dean, Texas A&M

University.

This important scientific gathering was co-sponsored by the Department of English of the Texas A&M University.

The participants of the conference also visited the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library in College Station and admired on its premises a sculpture symbolizing the fall of the Berlin Wall and a victory for freedom and democracy at the end of the Cold War. 

NAFSA 2009 Conference Draws Strong Czech Participation

Czech university and governmental representatives participated in the NAFSA 2009 Annual Conference and Expo, held at the Los Angeles Convention Center in California on May 24–29, 2009. The event brought together 7,500 international educators from around the world to exchange their views, form new alliances, and gain new perspectives on global education.

The annual event is the world’s leading gathering of representatives of schools, organizations, and companies involved in international education exchange. The ultimate goal of the conference was to ensure the maintained competitiveness of higher education institutes and universities on a global scale.

Tereza Babkova, coordinator of the Czech participation at the Expo, said: “NAFSA is a unique occasion for establishing and deepening contacts with foreign universities and agencies. This experience was confirmed by representatives



Photo courtesy of Jakub Tesar


Left to right: Jakub Tesar, Fulbright Commission; Martin Vasek, Masaryk University; Tereza Babkova, National Agency for European Educational Programs; Jan Zahradnik, University of South Bohemia; Dana Petrova and Rudolf Sindelar, National Agency for European Educational Programs; Helena Marie Adjal and Petra Tausl Prochazkova, University of West Bohemia

of Czech schools who participated in the conference and expo last year, at that time within the booth of Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovak Republic). That is why we decided to present the Czech Republic individually and at larger space this year.”

Czech universities and government agencies presented

under the common brand of the “Study in the Czech Republic” project carried out by the National Agency for European Educational Programs (NAEP), a part of the House of International Services of the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MSMT). The Czech J. William Fulbright Commission was co-organizer

of the booth. The Czech representation also was supported by the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC.

Representatives of 13 Czech institutions of higher education, the House of International Service and NAEP, the Fulbright Commission, and the Ministry of Education attended the event. 

“Our aim is to strengthen the ties between Czech universities and their American counterparts, or more broadly to help the internationalization of Czech universities. Participation at the NAFSA Conference and Expo serves this purpose extremely well and the Czech booth this year was a clear success.”

~ **Dr. Hana Ripkova, Executive Director, J. William Fulbright Commission**



Photo courtesy of Daniel Amz

Dr. Bohdan Pomahac

What It Is Like to Live Without a Face

After his arrival in 1996, Czech surgeon Dr. Bohdan Pomahac, then a recent graduate from the Palacky Medical School in Olomouc, started his U.S. journey without a clear prospect of a hospital residency or a permanent assignment. Today, he is ranked high in the elite society of best plastic surgeons in the world. Dr. Pomahac leads the face transplantation project at the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Massachusetts, which has been the lead facility worldwide in the history of transplantation.

Earlier this year, a team of more than 30 specialists led by plastic surgeon Dr. Bohdan Pomahac replaced the man's nose, palate, upper lip, and some skin, muscles, and nerves with those of a dead donor, during to-this-date the second successful face transplant in the U.S.

Dr. Pomahac was born in Ostrava, Czech Republic and his American journey was inspired by his internship at Harvard Medical School in Boston. After graduation in the Czech Republic, he passed the U.S. Medical License Examination, and decided to pursue his professional career in the United States.

"When I was considering my future during the final years of my studies, I was frustrated by the system of Czech post-gradual medical education. Personal efforts and endeavors were still less important than connections and traditional family ties within the medical community."

The openness and transparency of the U.S. medical environment inspired Dr. Pomahac; however, his beginnings in the U.S. were not easy.

"One of the two contacts I had in Boston after my arrival was plastic surgeon Elof Eriksson. I estimated that based on his European-like name, he could have a better understanding of what I was trying to achieve. He answered that I am more than welcome to come and see his work, but that unfortunately, there are no job openings at the moment and that he cannot award me with a salary. I started working without any pay until Dr. Eriksson appreciated my work ethic and downness and helped me get a scholarship. After two years in a lab, I entered the process of U.S. graduate medical training—the residency."



Photo courtesy of Brigham and Women's Hospital

Dr. Pomahac talks about the face transplantation project at a press conference in Prague.

"This is not a life saving procedure; it's a life giving procedure." The patient was "willing to accept anything, for him any face was better than none."
~Dr. Bohdan Pomahac

The process of rotation through various departments started at the Intensive Care unit. *"For somebody coming from Europe, it was a complete shock," remembers Dr. Pomahac. "I stayed up all night on my first day on the job, trying to study and learn what local physicians consider as basic ordinary procedures. The next day I stayed up another night, then another one. After a few months, I technically hit rock bottom," refers Dr. Pomahac to a 6 year lasting period of an incredible work load and learning process. "Today, physicians are only allowed to serve 80 hours in a week. During my time, it was 120 and there was so much night activity in my hospital that my sleep time was minimal. When I look back, it seems to me like insanity today."*

Although this was a very turbulent and exhausting period, Dr. Pomahac believes that the residency—the U.S. graduate medical training—is the best and most complex one.

"Considering the size of U.S. medical facilities, it is easier to experience greater variety of different departments

in comparison to smaller and more specialized facilities for example in Western Europe. You perform many surgical procedures on a daily bases—after three years in Brigham and the Women's Hospital, I would have been eligible for several types of residencies in various surgical fields, for example vascular surgery."

In 2004, Dr. Pomahac opened his private practice. Even though general plastic and aesthetic surgery could seem as his specialty, his medical routine consists of more complicated procedures.

"About one third of my time I spent on surgical procedures treating burn victims. The remaining two thirds could be described as general plastic procedures; however, I engage primarily in reconstructive surgeries with special focus on the head, face, and neck. Although aesthetic and cosmetic procedures generate more revenue and I am interested in it, it is better to have something else other than just one face-lift technique. Big reconstructive surgeries are the real challenges to me."

Dr. Pomahac became a real medical 'celebrity' after the April 9, 2009 surgery, when he led a team of over 30 doctors that performed the surgery. The operation was just the second of its kind to be conducted in the United States and among a handful worldwide. During the procedure that took over 17 hours, Dr. Pomahac's team conducted a challenging procedure that replaced a patient's entire mid face area, including the skin, the muscles and nerves, the nose, hard palate, and upper lip.

"I think a healthy person can not fully imagine what is it like to not have a face," says Bohdan Pomahac, who was treating his patient since his injury happened over 4 years ago, when he could only perform a very limited reconstruction. After the first year, he started to consider a reconstructive transplant surgery, because according to his own words, there is nothing that can replace the tissue and skin in the area of nose, lips, or eye lids.

Many people can wonder about what it is like to have a face from a dead donor, and many also question the controversy of the high cost of the surgery. Dr. Pomahac explicates:

"It is not a dead face anymore— it is a live face with vascular function again. This surgery was very controversial—many said they are too costly, they require life-long after surgical medical treatment, but they are not life saving...I had the opportunity to meet the French patient that underwent the historically first face transplant in 2005, and I have realized that for the patient it [the face transplant] is something entirely different in terms of the quality of the result, than what we used to be able to provide."

Personal interaction of the
Continued on page 5

What It Is Like to Live Without a Face (Continued from pg. 4)

patient helped Dr. Pomahac to realize the urgency of the need for similar patients.

“Not only she [the patient] was very happy, but when I asked her if in the future her body rejected the transplant, she immediately told me she would undergo the surgery again. This is not the answer we often hear from patients that had to undergo complicated, multiple grade surgeries, when the reconstruction is conducted through a multiple procedure process. Most of them say that they would not do it again.”

The scale of the surgery could be best described by its total time that exceeded 17 hours. When asked whether it is possible to maintain an absolute concentration during the procedure, Dr. Pomahac elaborates.

“I would not say my hands would get shaky when I have to stay up for a long time. It was not possible to relax at least until we connected the arteries from the donor onto the recipients face and renewed the blood circulation. We could relax a little bit after that.”

A facial tissue transplant, similar to other transplant surgical procedures, is a time sensitive matter; Dr. Pomahac’s team used 2 surgery rooms during the operation—one for the donor and one for the recipient. *“After the removal from a donor, you have to wash the tissue, clean all the blood and fill it with the preserving solution. The time from the initial interruption of the blood supply till the last stitch with which we initiated a blood supply from the recipient took us one hour and fifteen minutes,” describes Dr. Pomahac the initial phase of the face transplant.*

The facial transplant was the second one in the United States. The historically first face transplant was performed in Cleveland only a few months earlier despite the fact that Brigham and Women’s Hospital is the leading institution in the field of transplantation surgery. Dr. Pomahac also stresses the importance of donor banks and finding a compatible donor as crucial to the procedure’s success. In this case, the rules and restrictions

are a bit more complicated than during organ transplants.

“In the state of Massachusetts, we use the New England Organ Bank (NEOB). Citizens decide whether they are willing to participate as organ donors and this information is stated on their driver’s license. In the case of tissue donors, however, we need to ask the relatives of the donor again. Therefore, it is essential that we encounter family members that will have developed understanding for such a sensitive issue.”

Because such a unique and complicated surgical procedure is extremely expensive, both the surgeons and the hospital agreed to provide their services cost free. Dr. Pomahac explains that *“part of the agreement with the patient was that after his dismissal from the hospital, the aftercare—mostly the medication required—will be covered by his insurance company. We did not charge the patient for anything, and also the hospital agreed to waive all the fees.”*

That brings us the question of insurance and patient’s responsibility for the cost of his treatment. Dr. Pomahac compares the U.S. healthcare system with the Czech one.

“In general, the standard of Czech health care is very good. However, the system in the Czech Republic is not ideal. In the Czech Republic, you often have to battle with the insurance company whether they will cover the cost of the implant at all, while in here [USA], we only have to think about what implant is best for our patient.”

As Dr. Pomahac points out, the system is not ideal anywhere. The downside of the U.S. system is, according to him, the cost of insurance.

“Healthcare in the U.S. is very expensive. When we look at the nations GDP percentage spent of healthcare, the United States spends twice as much on healthcare then countries in west Europe.”

Elaborating on the future of his field and U.S. healthcare in general, Dr. Pomahac mentions the current economic crisis as an important factor.

“For some people it is



Dr. Bohdan Pomahac with his wife Hana and children

too much of a luxury to plan a cosmetic surgery these days, some can also not afford to miss work for two or three weeks due to the current crisis. Also, there is more general aspect to this. In the last twenty-five, or even maybe forty years, majority of medical research came from the

United States. New, expensive technologies originated and were tested here. America, to some extent, sponsored the rest of the world. The innovation goes where the money is. The question is whether the United States will still be able to finance this field.”

Dr. Bohdan Pomahac: Originally interested in neurosurgery or cardio surgery, he later decided to shift his professional focus onto the field of vascular surgery. His medical career started in 1996 in the Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, MA, where he currently specializes in facial aesthetic and reconstructive procedures and leads the face transplantation project at the BWH, helping patients with difficult head, neck, and breast reconstructive problems. He also serves as the Chief Resident of Plastic Surgery department at the Harvard Integrated Program in Plastic Surgery, and is a Founding Member of American Society for Reconstructive Transplantation.

Contributing writer: Daniel Anyz

Prague Hospital Manufactures New Anti-Cancer Vaccine



Photo courtesy of FN Motol

Local daily *Mlada Fronta Dnes* reported that a vaccine that may be able to halt and cure recurring cancer is being successfully manufactured in Motol Hospital in Prague.

The vaccine is effective against various forms of cancer, and intended to be used mainly in the treatment of melanoma, bowel cancer, leukemia, ovarian cancer, and other forms of recurring cancerous tumors.

Jirina Bartunkova, Motol’s leading researcher, stated that the clinic is currently drafting a request for clinical tests. Currently, the clinic is able to produce approximately 50 vaccines a year in their super pure lab; however, the current research has reached the stage where the production of the vaccine can be made on a larger scale. Negotiation with biotechnological firms has begun in order to start the production of the new vaccine.

Exhibition Honors Ambassadors' Spouses

The Embassy of the Czech Republic hosted an exclusive photo exhibition, featuring portraits of the spouses of EU Ambassadors accredited in the United States. This exhibition centered on the spouses, who support their loved ones in their

diplomatic careers by assuming very special and significant roles that encompass countless responsibilities.

As their dedication to building partnerships between nations is not always visible at first sight, the exhibition honors the spouses of the Ambassadors through the work of celebrated photographer Abby Greenawalt, a former intern in the studio of noted photographer, Annie Leibovitz.

The exhibition, which ran for two months, was introduced during an opening night reception held under the auspices of Mrs. Jaroslava Kolarova, wife of the Czech Ambassador, on March 20, with about twenty EU Ambassadors and their spouses in attendance. Senator Ben Nelson and his wife along with over two hundred additional guests viewed the portraits during the grand opening.



Portrait of Mrs. Jaroslava Kolarova by Ms. Abby Greenawalt



Photographer Abby Greenawalt (left), Ambassador Kolar, and Mrs. Jaroslava Kolarova, wife of the Czech Ambassador



Ms. Abby Greenawalt poses with EU Ambassadors' wives featured in the exhibition. From left to right: Mrs. Adele Keleti (Hungary), Mrs. Elena Pildegovics (Latvia), Mrs. Laurel Colless (Finland), Ms. Abby Greenawalt (Photographer), Mrs. Marie-Isabelle Callier (Luxembourg), and Mrs. Imsre Sabaliunas Bruzgiene (Lithuania)

Jaromir Funke and the Amateur Avant-Garde

This year, the National Gallery presents the first significant exhibition of Funke's work ever mounted outside of Europe: *Jaromir Funke and the Amateur Avant-Garde*.

Jaromir Funke (1896–1945) was one of the foremost photographers of the 1920s and 1930s in Czechoslovakia. The exhibition *Jaromir Funke and the Amateur Avant-Garde* includes 70 works by Funke and his leading contemporaries, among them Josef Sudek (1896–1976), one of the best-known Czech photographers worldwide, and Eugen Wiskovsky (1888–1964). The exhibition places Funke's career at the center of an important, if often overlooked, history of amateur modernism that developed quickly in central Europe from the very early 1920s with the creation of a nationwide network for serious camera enthusiasts in the newly-founded Czechoslovak Republic.

The exhibition is on display until August 9, 2009, in the National Gallery's West Building, Ground Floor, Inner Tier. For additional information about the exhibition or to listen to a pod cast about the artist, visit www.nga.gov/exhibitions/funkeinfo.shtm



The above photographs are part of the exhibition *Jaromir Funke and the Amateur Avant-Garde* at the National Gallery of Art.

Czech Events in the U.S.

August 14–16, 2009 (Protivin, IA)

The 31st Annual Protivin, Iowa Czech Days will kick off with dancing, polka bands, Czech food, games, and more. For additional information about the event, please e-mail jdostal@iowatelecom.net.

August 23, 2009 (Bechyn, MN)

The Annual Czech Festival in Bechyn will focus on commemorating and sharing Czech cultural heritage. For more information about the festival, e-mail info@czechfest.com.

August 23, 2009 (Brookfield, IL)

Enjoy the Annual Czechoslovak Annual Festival and Picnic beginning at 11 am at the Kiwanis Park. The event features live music, dancing, food and drinks. For more information, call 708/485-3357. Admission is free.

September 13, 2009 (Annandale, VA)

The 35th Annual Slavic American Festival will be held at the Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church located at 3410 Woodburn Road, Annandale, VA. The event includes a wide selection of Slavic food, games, rides, arts and crafts, raffle, live music and more. For more information, visit www.epiphanyofourlord.org.

Czech Figure Skater Inducted into Hall of Fame

Two-time figure skating world champion and three-time European champion Alena "Aja" Vrzanova is the first Czech woman to reach the World Figure Skating Hall of Fame. Vrzanova was solemnly introduced among the figure skating legends during the world championship that took place in Los Angeles in March 2009.

Ms. Vrzanova spent most of her active athletic career training and competing abroad, but remained a very dedicated and committed Czech patriot.

She left her country for figure skating training in London in the autumn of 1946. In January 1947, she won the championships of the republic, came in sixth in the European Championships and seventh in the World Championships. A year later, she won bronze at the European Championships in Prague and came in fifth at the World Cup in Davos and at the Olympics in St. Moritz. She won her first World Championship in 1949 in Paris.

In January 1950, she

achieved her third republic title, the European Championship in Norway and the World Championship in London.


Ms. Vrzanova received political asylum in England, due to a significant and persistent persecution from the communist regime that took control over Czechoslovakia in 1948. In April 1950, she went to the United States to work in the Ice Follies show for three years. She then skated for the next 13 years in the Ice Capades. 



Photo courtesy of Ambassador's Archive

Ambassador Kolar,
Mrs. Jaroslava Kolarova (right),
and figure skating champion
Alena Vrzanova (left)

Avalon Theater Presents New Season of Czech Films

The Avalon Theater, in its third year of collaboration with the Embassy of the Czech Republic on the *Lions of Czech Film Series*, remains committed to bringing award-winning Czech films to the Washington, DC community. The upcoming selections include a mix of Czech filmmaking, from comic slap-stick scenarios to more serious dramas reflecting on courage and freedom. The series runs on the second Wednesday of every month the community an opportunity to view Czech films that are popular hits in Europe and have garnered numerous awards at film festivals. Most of the films have received the prestigious Czech Lion Award, the Czech equivalent of an Academy Award. All of the films have limited distribution in the United States.

August 12, 8 pm



Photo courtesy of Bioscop

**Grapes
(Bobule)**

Honza, a likeable and intelligent small-time con man, learns by chance that his Moravian grandfather is dying. The news wrestles Honza out of his normal routine, and he decides to make his sick grandfather's dream of a lifetime come true. Grandfather, though, is afraid to leave his vineyard unattended. Honza offers to watch it for him. His buddy Jirka, who is short on brains but fabulous at hustling women, comes to visit.

This story confirms the philosophy that if you don't know where you're going in life, it's best to go back to your roots.

(Director: Tomas Barina, 2008, 90 min, in Czech with English subtitles)

September 9, 8 pm



Photo courtesy of Biograf Sverak

**Elementary School
(Obecna skola)**

Elementary School is a cinematographic childhood memory of screenwriter Zdenek Sverak and directed by his son Jan Sverak. The film takes place in the first year after the war in an atmosphere of reborn freedom and new hope for the future. The story revolves around young Eda and his relationship with two authority figures in his life—his father and his teacher Hnizdo.

This is the first film by the father and son team of Zdenek and Jan Sverak. They received an Oscar for their second film *Kolja*.

(Director: Jan Sverak, 1991, 100 min, in Czech with English subtitles)

October 14, 8 pm




Photo courtesy of Bioscop

**Tobruk
(Tobruk)**

Set in North Africa during World War II, twenty-year-old Jiri Pospichal signs up as a volunteer in the Czechoslovak army. His naive ideas about heroism are rawly confronted with the hell of the African desert, complicated relationships in his unit, and the ubiquitous threat of death. All this takes its cruel toll in the shape of his gradual loss of self respect and courage.

The plot of the film is freely based on the classic American novel *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, first published in New York in 1897.

(Director: Vaclav Marhoul, 2008, 100 min., in Czech with English subtitles)


The Avalon Theatre is located at 5612 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20015. Tickets may be purchased at the box office 30 minutes before the start of the show or online at www.theavalon.org. 

Kundera Receives Simone and Cino Del Duca Award

Milan Kundera, a world-renowned author of Czech origin, was awarded the prestigious Simone and Cino Del Duca Foundation World Prize for his life-time work and contribution in Paris on June 9, 2009.

Kundera accepted the prize from Helene Carrera d'Encausse, the head of the French Academy who also chairs the jury of the Simone and Cino Del Duca Foundation. The foundation, named after the famous Italian publisher Cino Del Duca, awards scholars, artists, and writers whose academic or literary work best reflects the message of modern humanism.

Milan Kundera was born in Czechoslovakia in 1929. He left Czechoslovakia due to persecution by the communist regime and settled in France in 1975. He became a French citizen in 1981.

His most famous works include *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1982), *The Joke* (1965), *Laughable Loves* (1969), and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979). 

International Conference on Holocaust Marks the End of the Czech EU Presidency

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not only the largest mass murder in history, but also the greatest organized mass robbery. This conference should secure the permanent interest of the international public in the issue, including education, leading to efforts to remedy the property damage or to care for the social and medical needs of those who survived the Holocaust.”

The plenary meeting of the conference, in the presence of heads of government delegations, took place on June 29, 2009, at the Prague Congress Center. The Czech delegation was led by Czech Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Jan Kohout; the European Commission was represented by

Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth Jan Figel; and the American delegation was headed by former Deputy Foreign Minister Stuart Eizenstat.

The program included a gala concert at the Terezin Memorial (former Riding School) under the baton of the conductor of the Oregon Philharmonic Orchestra, Murry Sidlin, who commemorated the performance of Verdi’s *Requiem* in the Terezin ghetto during the war.

The accompanying program also included the World Premiere of a Kabbalistic drama by George Whyte set to music by Noam Sheriff, *Golem 13*, and the Legacy of the Shoa Film Festival,



Czech Minister for European Affairs Stefan Fule (right) at the Holocaust Era Assets Conference

Photo courtesy of EU2009.cz

which took place under the auspices of Ben Kingsley on June 27 and 28 at the Svetozor Cinema. The festival was attended by American director of documentaries and writer of Czech origin

Zuzana Justmanova. Her documentary debut from 1989, *Terezin Diary*, is inspired by diaries that she kept during her two years spent in Terezin from 1943–1945.

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