

CZECH the NEWS

Newsletter of the Embassy of the Czech Republic

Vol. 2, 2010

Prime Minister Creates New Government

On the basis of the results of the parliamentary elections which took place in May 2010, Petr Necas, the leader of ODS (Civic Democratic Party), became the 11th Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and created a new government.

In addition to the ODS, two other parties, TOP 09 and VV (Public Affairs), make up the governing coalition. These three parties have signed a 50-page coalition agreement, focusing mainly on fiscal responsibility, law and the fight against corruption as the main goals for the new government.

The Social Democrats (CSSD) actually received the most votes in the May elections, with 22.1% of the vote or 56 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

However, right-wing and center-right parties (ODS with 20.2% of the vote or 53 seats, TOP 09 with 16.7% of the vote or 41 seats, and Public Affairs with 10.9% of the vote or 24 seats) formed a clear governing majority with a total of 118 seats in the 200-seat chamber. Thus, the Social Democrats and the Communist Party (KSCM) (11.3% or 26 seats) formed the opposition. After several election terms of either minority governments or governments with only a slight majority, this is the first time that a government of the Czech Republic has such a substantial majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

The election results also mean that there are two new parties in the parliament, TOP 09 and Public Affairs. On the other hand, two parties, the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL) and the Green Party, that were present in the parliament during the previous term did not obtain the necessary 5% of the vote to make it over the threshold and are thus no longer represented.

According to the coalition agreement, six ministers,



Czech Government "Family Photo"

Photo courtesy of www.vlad.cz

including the Prime Minister, are from the ODS, five are representatives of TOP 09, and four come from Public Affairs.

Prime Minister Necas was first elected as a member of parliament in 1992. He has served in such positions as Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Defense and Security and as the first Deputy Defense Minister. He was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Labor and Social Affairs in both of Mirek

Topolánek's governments. Petr Necas is married and has four children.

Karel Schwarzenberg, the head of TOP 09 and Minister of Foreign Affairs, will sit as first Deputy Prime Minister. He has previously served as the Foreign Minister in the cabinet of Mirek Topolánek in 2007-09.

The second Deputy Prime Minister is Radek John of Public Affairs. John entered into

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President Klaus Meets with Key Leaders in the US

On September 21–25, 2010, Czech President Vaclav Klaus undertook a working visit to the United States. He led the Czech delegation at the 65th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York City and also delivered remarks at two prestigious US universities in Washington, DC, and Ithaca, NY.

The President met members of the Czech Caucus in the US Congress in Washington, DC, and representatives of the Heritage Foundation, an influential US think-tank. He also delivered remarks on "Europe, the Systemic Consequences of the Slowly Abating Crisis and the Need to Re-Formulate the



Chargé d' Affaires, ad interim Daniel Kostoval, Czech President Vaclav Klaus, Congressman Joe Barton, and Czech Embassy Second Secretary David Frous meet in front of the capitol.

Photo courtesy of www.klaus.cz

Case for Capitalism" at Johns Hopkins University Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International

Studies (SAIS). The President's speech was attended by more

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Photo courtesy of Mary E. Fetzko

Dear Friends,

For those of you whom I have not yet had the opportunity to get to know personally, I would like to foremost introduce myself. I began my mission as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in August 2009 and, upon the end of former Ambassador Petr Kolar's assignment in the United States this past summer, assumed duties as Chargé d' Affaires, ad interim. It has already been my utmost pleasure to serve Czech interests abroad and work on continuing to bolster Czech-US relations.

My service comes during an exciting time in Czech politics. As you may all know, the Czech parliamentary elections took place in May and a coalition government consisting of the ODS (Civic Democratic Party), TOP 09, and VV (Public Affairs) parties was formed. I welcome you to read further in this special *Czech the News* edition to familiarize yourselves with our newly appointed government leaders and their coalition program, which focuses on fiscal responsibility and austerity, the rule of law, and the fight against corruption as the goals for the new government. I look forward to implementing and coordinating the vision of the Czech government abroad.

We are at the stage of the US-Czech bilateral relations, in which we would like to concentrate more on the economic and commercial aspects of our partnership. In line with this focus, our Embassy will strive to further facilitate the promotion and expansion of Czech businesses and investments to the US. We will continue to work closely with companies towards this end and, in the spirit of further assisting them, are mapping out investment incentives around the US. Our desire for deeper cooperation is encompassed in the Czech-US commercial dialogue announced this summer in Prague, stressing the shared commitment to strengthen economic and commercial ties between the two countries.

One of the Embassy's main tasks remains to assist Czech political dignitaries during their visits to the US. In September, Czech President Vaclav Klaus led the Czech delegation at the 65th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York City and also delivered speeches at two prestigious universities, Johns Hopkins and Cornell, during his stay in the US. We expect several additional high level visitors in the next months to come to meet with their counterparts in order to maintain and strengthen our transatlantic dialogue and tight cooperation on multiple issues.

Friends, I very much look forward to meeting many of you, enjoying the existing bond the Czech Republic and US share, and working to preserve this special friendship.

With kind regards,

Daniel Kostoval
Chargé d' Affaires, ad interim



Prime Minister Creates New Government *(Continued from pg. 1)*

only recently and became the leader of Public Affairs in 2009. He started out as a screenwriter and journalist.

Miroslav Kalousek (TOP 09) will hold the position of Finance Minister. This is not the first time that Kalousek is leading the Ministry; he held the same position in Topolánek's second government.

The Ministry of Defense is led by Alexander Vondra (ODS), who previously was in charge of European affairs in Mirek Topolánek's government and also is a former Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the United States. He held the post in Washington in the years of 1997-2001.

Martin Kocourek, an economic expert from the Civic Democrats, is now in charge of leading the Ministry of Industry

and Trade.

Vit Barta, a representative of Public Affairs, is the new Minister of Transportation. He is new to the world of politics, having previously worked in the business sector.

Leos Heger became the new Health Minister; he was previously a doctor specializing in radiology and long served as the Director of the Faculty Hospital in Hradec Kralove. He is a member of TOP 09.

Another representative of the Civic Democrats who sits in the Necas' government is Minister of Environment Pavel Drobil, an attorney.

The position of the Minister of Culture was given to Jiri Besser of TOP 09. He has been the Mayor of the city of Beroun for several terms.

The leadership of the



Former Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer and current Prime Minister Petr Necas

Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has been entrusted to TOP 09 Deputy Chairman Jaromir Drabek, former president of the Czech Chamber of Commerce.

The Ministry of Education is now led by Josef Dobes, Deputy Chairman and co-founding member of Public Affairs.

Jiri Pospisil has been entrusted to lead the Ministry of

Justice and to be the Chairman of the government's Legislative Council.

The local Development Minister is Kamil Jankovsky, a member of Public Affairs.

The Agriculture Ministry is now led by Ivan Fuksa (ODS), who had previously worked as the first Deputy Minister of Finance.

Coalition Government Proclaims New Policy Statement for the Public

The Embassy of the Czech Republic would like to familiarize our readers with the goals and policies of the new coalition government of the Czech Republic. Hence, below we include the Preamble of the Policy Statement of the Government of the Czech Republic, drawn on the basis of a mandate from the citizens of the Czech Republic granted in the elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament in May 2010 and presented by the Prime Minister Petr Necas before the Chamber itself. We consider this text to include the main tasks which lie ahead of the Czech government in the next four years.

“This Policy Statement contains the vision and tasks of a government which is aware of its responsibility to implement deep structural reforms of public systems, to lead the country successfully through the turbulence of the global economy of which we are an integral part, to retain and strengthen the democratic values of the Czech state and to protect the freedoms and individual rights of our citizens.

The government is convinced that the instruments which it intends to use to meet these goals and to which you will now be introduced are appropriate and correct and will lead to further development of the country. I believe that you will identify with these proposals and will support this government of budgetary responsibility, a government of the rule of law and the fight against corruption and that you will give it your mandate to start work on these tasks.

Our country is not in an easy position. The global crisis has demonstrated the vulnerability of every economy, and has revealed the errors made by political leaders in times of apparently continuously sustainable growth and certainty. It has made quite clear that living on debt is not possible long-term, not only within a family, but also within the confines of states. The price which citizens of many countries must now pay for this recklessness is high.

The Czech Republic is now at a crossroads. Either, figuratively speaking, we pull on the emergency brake and stop the deepening negative trends, in particular state indebtedness, the long-term disfunctionality of key public systems such as the pensions system and health care, we start to cut out the cancer from society—corruption, and improve the competitiveness of our economy, or we fall gradually among those countries of whom it is known that they are unable to deal with their own

We consider the following measures to be the government's main tasks

- ▶ To reform public finances with the aim of stopping the rising public debt and setting the parameters of budget policy so that balanced state budgets can be achieved by 2016;
- ▶ To adopt a package of reform measures leading to the modernization and improved efficiency of the healthcare system;
- ▶ To implement reform of the tertiary education system; and
- ▶ To adopt measures leading to a fundamentally higher level of transparency in the area of public contracts and measures reducing the scope for corruption in the public sector.

problems and are threatened with painful remedial measures which are no longer completely under their own control.

Our government wishes to go down the first of these roads. We will not hide our heads in the sand over problems which many still do not see, or do not wish to see, because they are not yet so pressing, leaving someone else to solve them tomorrow. For this reason we are not resigned to deficit state financing, even if we hear voices belittling this fact by pointing to the much higher indebtedness of countries which are comparable to ourselves. Nowadays, we

can follow the consequences of such an approach quite literally live on television. We will go hard for reform of the pensions system, even if many console themselves with the thought that the present state of affairs can go on for another couple of years. We do not wish our children to one day reproach us with our lack of responsibility towards future generations. We will support the spirit of enterprise and initiative because we know that only the business sector, not the state, creates society's wealth.

Our country is part of supranational political structures, in particular the EU and NATO.

The government is aware that these memberships are fundamental for the Czech Republic for its long-term security, stability and international standing. The government will continue to develop these links and will actively participate in projects to improve the security, predictability and stability of the international community and the Czech Republic with it.

The government will implement its policies in the long-term interests of the citizens of this country and the generations who will follow us. We wish to work together on this with all who share the same interest. We are ready for dialogue and will not shirk our responsibilities.

In its Policy Statement the government has set out a whole series of important tasks, each of which is significant and is irreplaceable. It is nevertheless necessary to emphasize key projects which make up the main theme and purpose for the existence of a government of budgetary responsibility, a government of the rule of law and the fight against corruption.

To read the entire text of the Policy Statement, please visit www.vlad.cz.



President Klaus Meets with Key Leaders

(Continued from pg. 1)



President Klaus gives a speech at Johns Hopkins University.

over 600 guests.

On September 25, the President partook in the opening of the General Debate of the 65th session of the UN General Assembly in New York City and delivered his remarks representing the Czech Republic before this body.

than 200 people and joined via a teleconference by students at four other US universities. Then, the President visited Cornell University in Ithaca, NY, a place where he studied in 1969. He delivered a speech titled: “A Return to Cornell: Personal Remarks of the President of the Czech Republic,” which was heard by



President Klaus presents a lecture at Cornell University.



Czech Foreign Minister Travels to Washington

Czech Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg undertook a working visit to the United States on October 4–6, 2010, during which time he met with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, as well as with representatives of several prestigious think tanks, and attended the concert *Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezin* at the

Kennedy Center. On Tuesday, October 5, Minister Schwarzenberg met with US think tanks from across the political spectrum to hear their views regarding Czech-US relations. In the morning hours, the Minister met with representatives of the American Enterprise Institute and had lunch with experts of the Brookings Institution. He

subsequently met with members of the Aspen Institute. On Wednesday, October 6, Minister Schwarzenberg partook in a morning discussion at the CEPA think tank, followed by an afternoon bilateral meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the Department of State. The main topics for discussion at this meeting were Czech-US relations, Afghanistan, security

and transatlantic relations. During his visit, on October 6, the Embassy of the Czech Republic opened the exhibition *Yes, Masaryk: The President Tomas Garrigue Masaryk*. In the evening, as an honorary guest, Minister Schwarzenberg attended the concert *Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezin* at the Concert Hall of the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

Foreign Minister Pays Tribute to Masaryk at Opening

Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg opened the exhibition *Yes, Masaryk: President Tomas Garrigue Masaryk*, on October 6, 2010, to an audience of over 100 people at the Embassy of the Czech Republic.

Professor of History and International Relations of the Elliott School of International Affairs, Dr. Hugh Agnew, also gave a brief speech about the life of Masaryk, including tidbits of knowledge of his travel on horseback through Rock Creek Park and his stay in America. The exhibition features photographs provided by Prague Castle Archives that are on exhibit for the first time in the United States.

Through a collection of black and white pictures accompanied by short powerful quotes, the exhibition gives an intimate look at the life of Tomas Garrigue Masaryk. Additional panels provide information about his life from boyhood to diplomat and president. The photographs, quotes, and stories presented throughout the exhibi-



Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg and Chargé d' Affaires, ad interim, Daniel Kostoval open the exhibition *Yes, Masaryk: President Tomas G. Masaryk*.

tion remind viewers of President Masaryk's commitment to freedom, democracy, human rights and peace, and his conviction that those ideals transcend time, geography, ethnicity, and language.

Masaryk remains a key example of Czech-American relations, for the bonds he formed in the US are still strong. He had a professorship at the University of Chicago, married an American citizen—Charlotte Garrigue, and even convinced President Woodrow Wilson of the rightness of

his cause: Masaryk called for the independence of his country and other oppressed people of Central Europe.

The exhibition is a part of a series of events entitled *TGM—Mutual Inspirations*, which strives to examine Czech and American cultural connections.

This year also marks the 160th birthday anniversary of both Tomas Garrigue Masaryk and his wife Charlotte Garrigue Masaryk, and the exhibition serves to celebrate and bear witness to his life.



Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg speaks with a reporter.



Dr. Hugh Agnew talks about Masaryk at exhibition opening.



The public views panels at the opening of the exhibition.

Czech Based Company CGS Tyres Invests in Iowa

CGS Tyres will open a tire production plant in Charles City, located in Iowa, USA. It will invest approximately \$44 million and will gain incentives amounting to approximately \$8 million. Production should begin in January 2012 with approximately 159 new jobs created. CGS Tyres plans production in three phases. During the third phase, manufacturing capacity of radial farm tires should reach 12,200 tons, run by 262 employees.

On August 30–September 1, 2010, Josef Dvoracek, the Head of the Economic and Commer-

cial Section at the Czech Embassy, traveled to the cities of Des Moines and Boone, Iowa, to partake in the ceremonious signing of the investment and incentive agreements at the 2010 Farm Progress Show. At the signing at the CGS Tyres exhibition booth, firm founders Tomas Nemeč and Oldřich Slemr as well as General Manager Jaroslav Cechura and other representatives of the company were present. Iowa Governor Chet Culver and Mayor of Charles City James Erb also participated in the launching of CGS Tyres'

operations on the US market.

CGS Tyres is the tire division of the CGS Holding Group (Czech Rubber Company), which consists mainly of the parent company Mitas a.s., a traditional Czech manufacturer of off-the-road agricultural and industrial tires. The history of the company Mitas goes back to the 1930s when tire production started in Prague, the capital of then Czechoslovakia, and in the city of Zlín. Mitas currently operates three plants in the Czech Republic and one in Serbia. These plants produce tires for farm ma-

chinery, off-the-road machines and construction machinery, for motorcycles, high-lift trucks, light-goods vehicles and some airplanes. The Czech-based tire manufacturer, with an annual turnover of close to \$400 million, belongs among the top three European producers of agricultural and construction equipment tires and, in the global tire market, Mitas ranks 27th. In Europe, actually every fourth tractor and combine uses tires from CGS Tyres. The firm is set to become an important manufacturer of tires in the US, Canada, and Mexico.

Avalon Theater Continues to Bring Czech Films to DC

The Avalon Theater, in its fourth 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 series runs on the second Wednesday of every month and gives the community an opportunity to view Czech films that are popular hits in Europe.

November 10, 8 pm



Kawasaki's Rose
(*Kawasakiho ruze*)

December 8, 8 pm



Dreamers
(*Zoufalci*)

Film Synopsis: Pavel Josek, an eminent scientist and former dissident, is due to receive a state honor for bravery. He is loved by his wife and adored by his daughter Lucie. During the filming of a television documentary about his life, it comes to light that at the beginning of the 1970s—under pressure from the secret police—he played a part in the discrediting of a former friend, who was ultimately forced to emigrate. The family drama sheds light on the practices employed by the secret police to discredit its opponents. Meanwhile, Lucie discovers secrets of her father's past that may change her life forever. (DIR: Jan Hrebejk, 2010, 100 min., in Czech with English subtitles)

Film Synopsis: Thirtysomethings Linda, Radim, Tonda, Otakar, Dagmara, and Silvie have been friends since they met as teenagers. All of them arrived in the big city, Prague, from their small home town. Their euphoric dreams have not materialized, and they feel trapped in different ways. They all seem to know one thing: what they don't want in life. At a party back in their home town they reminisce over one of their early dreams: to buy a farm, live together, and have fun with their lives. In the weeks that follow, each of them is faced with a crisis that brings this old dream into sharper, more sober focus. Can they make their dream a reality? (DIR: Jitka Rudolfova, 2009, 97 min., in Czech with English subtitles)

The Avalon Theatre is located at 5612 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC. Tickets may be purchased at the box office or online at www.theavalon.org.

Czech Films Featured in EU Showcase at AFI

The American Film Institute (AFI) presents the 23rd AFI European Union Film Showcase, a selection of new films from EU member states including film festival award winners, box office hits, and US premieres. Among the films being presented are two Czech award-winning films.

November 14, 3 pm
November 15, 7 pm



3 Seasons in Hell
(*3 sezony v pekle*)

November 21, 5:15 pm
November 22, 7 pm



Men in Rut
(*Muzi v rijji*)

Film Synopsis: Nineteen-year-old Ivan is the embodiment of the dreams and ideals of the year 1947. The self-satisfied and confrontational poet finds understanding with freethinking Jana. Together, they experience the end of hope. After February 1948, the communist regime reveals its repressive side. Tomas Masin's debut feature is loosely inspired by the autobiography of leftist underground guru Egon Bondy. The film was selected for the Karlovy Vary Film Festival 2010. Among its many awards, the film has received the Czech Lion Award for Best Actor, Best Cinematography, and Best Sound. (DIR: Tomas Masin, 2009, 110 min., in Czech with English subtitles)

Film Synopsis: The mayor and business leaders of Mourinov, a town in a remote corner of South Moravia in the Czech Republic, hatch a scheme to improve their fortunes by hosting a European championship for stag calling. They hope to impress their local MP enough to put their town on the map, literally, by convincing him to apply for EU funds to build a new highway connecting them with the wider world. But first, the mayor needs to settle his feud with the local stag calling champ, keep the MP drunk, and figure out what to do with a bunch of drag queens brought in from Prague. Gentle humor meets trenchant political satire in this utterly charming tale. (DIR: Robert Sedlacek, 2009, 110 min., in Czech with English subtitles)

The AFI Silver Theater and Cultural Center is located at 8633 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, MD. Tickets may be purchased at the box office or online at www.afi.com/silver/new/.

Kids Euro Festival Presents New Czech Animation



The Kids Euro Festival welcomes Czech animator Jiri Barta's mystical masterpiece: *In the Attic* to the AFI Theater in Silver Spring, MD, on November 6 at 11:30 am.

In the film, abandoned toys in a magical attic have taken up residence in an old trunk. They look forward to their daily rituals and games, going to work and celebrating birthdays... That is, until the dark ruler of the Land of Evil kidnaps their dear friend, the sweet doll Buttercup. The adventurous rescue mission, rife with suspenseful situations, dangerous moments, as well as comic elements and humorous twists, has just begun. (2009, 75 min., in Czech with English subtitles)

Film critic Jackson Bishop of AFI Filmfest in Hollywood wrote, "In the Attic has an immense amount of heart put into it, and as much, if not more, cleverness and skill, which makes the film an absolute joy to watch... The cinematography in the film by Zdenek Pospisil is also extraordinary, especially considering Barta's assertion that no computer work was used in the film."

The film won the Grand Prize at the New York Children's International Festival (2010).

Admission to the performance is free. Tickets can be picked up at the box office on the day of the show. The AFI Silver Theater and Cultural Center is located at 8633 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, MD.

Czech and Slovak Christmas Traditions Celebrated

Traditionally, Christmas Day in the Czech and Slovak Republics was celebrated mainly as a religious observance.

Advent

The period of Advent includes the commemorative days of a number of saints, and includes many popular customs and superstitions. Some of the customs have a connection to Christian beliefs, but many are still based on the beliefs of original pagan mythology. Advent begins on November 30, with St. Andrew's Day, and continues throughout December with St. Barbara's Day, St. Nicholas Day, and the day of St. Lucille. The fast of Advent ends on Christmas Eve (Vánoce, in Czech and Vianoce, in Slovak) which is on December 24. Legend held that anyone who fasted until the end of Advent would see the "Golden Piglet" and have good luck all the following year.

The Christmas calendar starts on November 30, St. Andrew's Day. This holiday was traditionally dedicated to fortune telling, though today this has become more of a Christmas Eve activity.

Advent continues on December 4 (St. Barbara's Day), when girls bring a sprig of blossoming cherry tree into the house and place it in water. Called "Good Luck Branches," it is believed that if the branch blossoms on Christmas Eve, it means good luck is in store and the girl will find a good husband during the coming year.

Svaty Mikulas



Photo courtesy of Mary E. Fetzko

The first real celebration is Svaty Mikulas (St. Nicholas Day) on December 6. Svaty Mikulas is revered because of his compassion and love for children, especially orphans, whom he visited and comforted with little gifts. Legend has it that Svaty Mikulas descends



Old Town Square in Prague, Czech Republic

Photo courtesy of Czech Tourism

from heaven on a golden cord accompanied by an angel (Anđel) all in white and a devil (Cert) dressed in black with his face painted red. Svaty Mikulas walks through villages, stopping at each home to ask the children about their behavior during the past year. The Angel carries a pen and a scroll to record their answers, while the Devil lurks in the background rattling his chain. The children should sing a song or recite a poem for Svaty Mikulas. A favorable response is rewarded with a gift or candy, fruit, or cookies. An unfavorable response earns a lump of coal or a potato from the Devil. Traditionally, most children get at least one rock as no child is perfect.

Carp

The tradition of eating carp on Christmas Eve appeared in the 19th century, when the upper classes began to enrich their meal with fish, turkey, and deer. Those who were less well-off could only afford carp. The pond-raised carp are sold in village streets at Christmas time and purchased live. To the delight

of the children in the household, the carp was put into the bathtub to swim around until it was time to begin the Christmas Eve meal preparations. Fish scales should be placed under Christmas dinner plates or under the tablecloth to bring wealth to the house. Carrying a fish scale in a wallet all year will ensure that money will not run out.



Photo courtesy of www.radiopraha.cz

Vanocka

Vanocka (a special bread made for Christmas) has a long history and is still popular today. The first reference to vanocka was in the 16th century, and over the long years it has gone through many small transformations. At one time, a vanocka could only be made by a baker who was a guild craftsman. In the 18th century, people began to bake them at home by themselves. At the end

of Christmas Eve dinner, a large vanocka is sliced up, and in some areas, a slice was given to the livestock, so they'd be healthy and safe from evil spirits. The woman of the house must mix the dough while wearing a white apron and kerchief, she shouldn't talk, and she was supposed to jump up and down while the dough was rising. Another old custom was to bake in a coin. The person who found it in their slice was assured of health and wealth for all of the following year. A burnt or ripped vanocka was a bad omen. Today, the vanocka is an indispensable and necessary part of the Christmas holidays, whether made at home or bought in a store. Even today there are handy people capable of making the lower braid out of seven strands (it's most often made from four), or else they braid the whole vanocka together at once from six strands.



Photo courtesy of Mary E. Fetzko

Christmas Tree and the Baby Jesus

The custom of decorating a Christmas tree came to the Czech and Slovak Republics from Germany. Traditional decorations include candles, hand-blown glass ornaments, gingerbread cookies, wrapped candies, nuts, "medovniky" (honey cakes), and ornaments crafted from straw, cloth, and baked dough. Sometimes, in Slovakia, the Christmas tree is hung upside down over the holiday table. When a tree is bought, it is secretly hidden away; no one is allowed to see it until after dinner on December 24. Only the head of the household trims the tree, done on the morning of Christmas Eve, and only he or she can see the tree until that magic moment when the Baby Jesus (Jezisek) arrives (which always happens after dinner). After the meal, when someone secretly rings a bell on the Christmas tree, it means Baby Jesus had visited, and the family is allowed to open

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Czech and Slovak Christmas Traditions Celebrated *(Continued from pg. 6)*

their presents. Little children believe that the donor is the newborn Baby Jesus, traveling through the countryside.

Christmas Day is Hod Bozi. After church services, the main meal is usually roast goose with dumplings and sauerkraut. The day is spent visiting with relatives and friends. In Slovakia, the "jaslickari," (men and boys of the village), go from house to house, carrying a miniature nativity scene, and bringing wishes for bountiful crops, fertility, love, peace, and satisfaction.

St. Stephen's Day and Silvestr

The day after Christmas is St. Stephen's Day. It used to be a day for children to go caroling and receive rewards of candies, fruits, and cookies. "On Stephen's Day there is no master" is a popular expression. Nowadays, families



Nativity scene exhibited in Prague's Old Town Square, Czech Republic.

stay at home and relax or visit relatives and friends to share the special time.

December 31st is called Silvestr, after the Saint's day. A festive drink of eggnog with cognac is served. Traditionally, little sandwiches (chlebicky) consisting of white bread heaped with potato salad, ham, eggs, sliced pickles, and cheese are served. The religious

aspect of this holiday has been overshadowed by the feasting, drinking, and fireworks displays to celebrate this last night of the year.

Three Kings' Day

With the end of the Christmas season on January 6 marked by Three Kings Day (Tri Krale), three wise men would dress up in costumes and go caroling. With a piece of chalk blessed by a lo-

cal priest, they would inscribe the words "Kaspar," "Melichar," and "Balthazar" or just "K+M+B" above the doorway of the home to insure a blessing on the household.

This article was created by Katerina Cinkova, a former intern at the Embassy of the Czech Republic. Sources used to compile story include:

Posel-Czech Catholic Union
Nov./Dec. 2009 Edition.

www.iexplore.com/dmap/Czech+Republic/Event/19080

hwww.myczechrepublic.com/czech_culture/czech_holidays/christmas.html

www.archiv.radio.cz/christmas/

www.nebraskaczechs.org/czech_christmas_traditions.htm

Embassy Promotes the Spirit of Giving

The Embassy of the Czech Republic will host a number of events during the holiday season with part of the proceeds going to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

UNICEF is the driving force that helps build a world where the rights of every child are realized. The organization was created with the following purpose in mind—to work with others to overcome the obstacles that poverty, violence, disease and discrimination place in a child's path.

The organization advocates for measures to give children the best start in life, promotes girls' education, acts so that all children are immunized against common childhood diseases and are well nourished, works to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, upholds the Convention of Rights of the Children to assure equality for those who are discriminated against, and much more.

Events that the public can participate in at the Embassy of the Czech Republic that will promote the spirit of giving include:

Czech Christmas Market November 4 and 5, 3-7 pm

The Embassy welcomes the community to the Czech Christ-

mas Market which will include crafts, singing, exhibitions, and much more. Admission is free.

During the event, the European Trading Company will present a large collection of beautiful Czech handmade Christmas ornaments just in time for the holiday season. The ornaments come in all shapes and sizes, revealing the intricate craftsmanship of Czech artisans.

The market will also feature an exhibition of Nativity scenes and paper Nativity scenes for sale, an exhibition of original drawings by Marcela Vichrova entitled *A Modern View on the Nativity Scene* with original drawings for sale, and a presentation on making wool ornaments by IGNIS which helps to provide jobs to handicap persons living in the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, a selection of stunning crystal will be on display as well as for sale to the public. Master engraver Zdenek Tomecek from the Czech Republic will demonstrate his artistic abilities and offer his glass carving services at the event to anyone who would like to have their crystal personally engraved.

To complete the atmo-



Rudolflet Quartet

sphere, the Rudolflet Quartet will enchant visitors with a wide selection of Christmas songs. The quartet hails from Prague, Czech Republic and is comprised of Ondrej Holub, Filip Damec, Michal Podlaha, and David Pistecky, under the direction of Lenka Pistecka and accompanied on piano by Martin Rudovsky.

Preholiday Concert November 23, 6:30 pm

Kackala, a Czech-American all-women's a capella group, will present a special charity concert at the Embassy of the Czech Republic.

They will sing a mixture of songs, bringing furious words of wisdom to through their upbeat tunes, liberation songs, and Christmas music.

Through a mix of mad girl, bad girl, and sad girl original compositions and a dash of homemade choreography,

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Czech Christmas ornament



Czech glass engraving



Czech Nativity scene



Embassy Promotes the Spirit of Giving

(Continued from pg. 7)

Kackala creates dynamic and entertaining performances. The group includes Hilary Binder, Eva Kubesova, Katerina Kubesova, Stacey Rubin, and Lexa Walsh. Suggested donation for the concert is \$5.

Patron of this month's *Spirit of Giving* events is Patrik Elias, who is involved with UNICEF as the Czech Republic's Good Will Ambassador. Elias is not only one of the best hockey players in the NHL playing for the New Jersey Devils, but he also participates with his wife Petra on a number of charitable projects.



Photo courtesy of Patrik Elias

Patrik Elias helps children throughout the world through his collaboration with UNICEF.

For more information about UNICEF, please visit www.unicef.org.



Czech Events in the US

November 13, 12-4 pm (Bethesda, MD)

Christmas Bazaar

The Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences presents its annual Christmas Bazaar which will feature crafts, food, a children's corner, and much more. Location: River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD.

December 4 (Washington, DC)

Family Mikulasska | Saint Nicholas Feast

American Sokol Washington, DC welcomes the community to its annual Family Mikulasska. For more information about the event, please visit: www.sokolwashington.org.

For additional events, visit www.czechevents.net.

