
International Leadership Institute: 1989-2014

25 years of focus on
the Czech Republic &
East Central Europe

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Introductory remarks

The Velvet Revolution, 1989

When the Berlin Wall was dismantled in 1989 with much fanfare and no violence, the world rejoiced that the Soviet bloc had finally collapsed. Since WWII ended, the nation states caught between politically free Western Europe and communist Eastern Europe had suffered a kind of colonial captivity (Soviet bloc states were Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, East Germany, Poland, Estonia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Hungary and Lithuania).

Seen as the price of cooperation to end WWII, the giving of formerly-independent nations to Soviet control became the new normal. All US post-war diplomacy and military development was juxtaposed against Soviet power, leading to a theory that the Soviet bloc nations were a sad but necessary buffer between the two world superpowers. Very few gave serious thought to what would happen if the Soviet bloc nations were again free to participate in European economic, political and financial life.

Then the unexpected became reality. In the space of months, borders opened and people could move wherever they chose. The closed Soviet-modeled economies were thrown open, Russian soldiers went home, and anyone could get a passport. This sudden shift left the US in a state of shock and left these countries vulnerable to anyone with the will and means to impose a new system.

Why the International Leadership Institute was there

ILI had a stake in all this. President and CEO Jaroslav Tusek was a native of Czechoslovakia, born there in 1941 under German Nazi rule, educated and employed there for 26 years until he left in 1967 to study in Norway and did not return. He came to the US in 1968 and gained citizenship in 1975, building a life in academia and business. But he never believed that the Soviets would hold power forever, especially when his studies and research at Columbia University (NYC), the World Council of Churches (Geneva, Switzerland), the International Peace Research Institute (Oslo, Norway), and the World Without War Council (San Francisco, CA) convinced him that economic stagnation under Soviet policies was eroding the Russian government's hold on to its empire.

When the Wall fell, Jaroslav went to Prague right away. He saw his parents there for the first time since 1967 (their passports had been confiscated, and he could not return without paying a huge fine and being imprisoned immediately) and visited with friends and family to get a picture of the country. He witnessed the impact of 40 years of neglect on the buildings, streets and parks of Prague, but was especially concerned about the impact of the totalitarian regime on the minds of the people and their way of life. He determined to do something significant for his native country, and to use ILI as his vehicle.

Executive Education Programs are launched



By 1990, ILI was in negotiation with the Czechoslovak government to work as partners on the *Executive Education Programs for Czechoslovak Business Leaders*, a joint project funded by the Czechoslovak government, ILI, and American business firms who took on the visiting executives as business interns.

This program received significant support from US and European Chambers of Commerce. ILI also received help in program content, logistics, social events and marketing from the World Trade Center, Chattanooga; the *Chattanooga Business Journal*; Covenant College; the University of North Florida; Jacksonville University; a group of volunteer host families in North Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, and New York; a group of volunteer Business Seminar presenters in Florida; and a group of more than 950 Business Intern sponsors that stretched across the US.

American English language immersion programs help aspiring leaders

In those 17 years, ILI also assisted aspiring leaders from the former Soviet bloc through *American English Language Immersion Programs*. These young people had the chance to improve their English language skills, learn some leadership essentials and be challenged by life in a new environment as they lived with their American host families. They attended classes at local universities, enjoyed recreational and social activities, went on hikes, horseback rides and canoe trips, and went to family vacations, activities and worship services with their hosts.

From these programs, many AELIP participants built international careers in law, business and communications in Asia, Europe and the US, as well as enduring relationships. AELIP programs were offered from 1990 till 2007, with more than 300 participating young people from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany and Switzerland.





ILI Executive Education Programs in the Czech Republic

Help Czech and Slovak businesses make the transition to free markets

For ILI, the years 1989-2006 were devoted to helping Czech and Slovak business and professional leaders make a successful transition to a market economy operating in a political democracy. In those years, ILI also worked with US AID, an international development project from the US Department of State, in which ILI assisted business and professional leaders from Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania and Macedonia in their transitions from the Soviet closed model to the free world's open model. ILI programs helped more than 900 post-Soviet bloc executives in this way, with over a billion dollars in US-European business resulting from the business and personal relationships built by the executives.

Institute programs were designed to help these leaders overcome their past isolation and develop closer economic and social ties with the United States. In addition to giving participants the needed tools for success in their home organizations, these programs stressed the importance of building free, open market economies in the context of democratic political systems.

EEP-CBL purpose and results (1990-1996)

Since 1989, the International Leadership Institute has maintained a steady focus on developments in the Czech Republic. Beginning with its return from a totalitarian communist regime to political democracy and a free-

market economy in 1989, through its transition from Czechoslovakia to the Czech Republic in 1993, its joining of the EU in 2004, and up to today's economic and political challenges and opportunities, we have done our part as a business to help the people living in the Czech Republic to adjust to rapid and continual change.

We developed and delivered programs that aimed at introducing business leaders to a different system of ethics and different definitions of "success." The *EEP-CBL* programs (later called *Business Leadership Forum: USA*) offered Czech and Slovak business executives the chance to see American business up-close in internships and networking events, while learning the fundamentals of American business practice in University courses.



From 1991-1997, the International Leadership Institute's main focus was on organizing and delivering *EEP-CBL* and *BLF: USA* programs in the United States. To deliver these multi-faceted, comprehensive programs, the Institute partnered with more than 950 businesses, government agencies universities, chambers of commerce, training organizations, and host families.

These partners included, among others, such institutions as the Czechoslovak Ministry of Industry, Olomouc Training Center, the World Trade Center- Chattanooga, Covenant College, the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade, the University of North Florida, the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, and Jacksonville University's Institution for World Capitalism. More than 950 American-based businesses led seminars, sponsored interns and provided business networking events to the *EEP-CBL* participants.

The *EEP-CBL* programs were originally developed to help major industrial enterprises in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in their transition from a state-planned economy operating in a communist political system to a free-market economic system operating in a democracy. Key results included the following:

- More than 700 executive participants from the Czech Republic and Slovakia;
- More than US\$ 1 billion in contracts for new international business ventures between Central European program participants and US-based firms;

- Successfully-negotiated contracts between Central European and US-based companies, including purchase/sale of products, outsourcing of parts production, joint ventures and setting up of international offices;
- New international employment and educational opportunities for program graduates;
- International social, educational and cultural exchanges between program participants and their American host families;
- More realistic and productive relationships between Central European executive participants and their American executive counterparts, internship sponsors, trainers, lecturers, host families and new acquaintances.

The Czech government, our constant partner in selecting the executive candidates and giving them financial assistance, officially accomplished its economic transition in 1995, when then-Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus announced the privatization of Czech enterprises had been successfully completed, signaling the fulfilling of our contractual agreement with the Czech government, which had begun in 1990.



Business Leadership Forum: USA and US AID Programs (1997-2004)



After 1996, the Institute served as a training provider for US AID (Agency for International Development) programs of the US Department of State, through World Learning, Washington, D.C. Participants in USAID programs came to the US from Macedonia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia and Lithuania.

These programs were funded entirely by US AID. Trainees were selected for participation based on their ability to make positive economic, political or social change in their country. Typically, these participants possessed technical or

academic skills, and leadership qualities, were committed to development, and were striving to become effective leaders in managing change.

American English Language Immersion Programs in the United States (1990-2007)



Beginning in 1990, the International Leadership Institute delivered *American English Language Immersion Programs in the United States*. ILI's AELIP programs primarily offered young, aspiring leaders a way to improve their English language skills while enjoying the hospitality of an American family.

Through sight-seeing, academic courses, and being part of daily life in the US, these young people were given the chance to expand their views of life and redefine themselves accordingly. AELIP Participants from Czech Republic, Slovakia, Switzerland and Germany ranged from students to young aspiring professionals. More than 300 students took part in AELIP programs.

Results of this program can still be seen today, with enduring friendships, visits from host family to students in Europe, careers built on relationships and study commenced in the US, and marriages whose roots can be traced to the participants' AELIP experiences. These programs often provided some light-hearted good times, a relief from the seriousness of the executive programs, whose business participants were busy expanding their business networks and making the most of their studies and internships.



Business was not the only area that needed help

In many ways, the major damage done to the Czech Republic was not the 40 years of neglect of maintenance and development to its infrastructure of buildings, roads, bridges and waterways, nor the stifling of competitiveness (leading to rampant corruption) in its businesses and governmental organizations. These are straightforward, if not easy, fixes. Our *Executive Education Programs for Czech and Slovak Business Leaders (EEP-CBL)*, (1991-1996) and our *American English Language Immersion Programs in the United States (AELIP)*, (1990-2007) provided the chance for people prepared to lead the country into prosperity in open world markets to improve their skills, add to their knowledge, and change their attitudes; more than 950 individuals participated in these programs.

The major damage, as we saw it, was to the moral, ethical and spiritual life of the people living in such a soul-stealing system. Communism as practiced in Czechoslovakia was not just a way of organizing the economy and government; it was a way of controlling the citizens' minds and spirits by repressing their core human rights and making creativity a crime. The government dictated everything about daily life through strict laws, a cadre of spies, and a pervasive dishonesty that destroyed people's belief in justice and social respect. Not only was the basic social contract that legitimizes governments breached to the point of non-existence, but the very idea that a society could be established that would treasure the rights of the individual and protect citizens from the excesses of the State was made into a fairy tale.



Our desire to respond President Vaclav Havel's urging that Czech society to pay attention to morals, values and ethics while it was developing in more materialistic ways led us down a new path. Havel's remark in his November 2006 address at Columbia University rang in our ears.

I believe that spirit is prior to matter, and I believe that certain human values like solidarity and civil rights are the most important things and that everything else in a

society should be subordinate to these values.

So in 2006, ILI shifted its programs from business, language and economic development to spiritual development. The results of this shift are detailed in the second part of this report, entitled *Tusek Christian Mission to the CR; 2010-2014*.

Conclusion and further action: not enough

By 2002, we had begun to see that simply helping Czechs and Slovaks in their career and educational pursuits was not enough. There was a gap in their culture. From 2006 on, we shifted our focus to finding ways to assist in the establishment of what former President Vaclav Havel termed “civic society” in the Czech Republic. Just taking care of people’s material needs, while important, was not the path to a functioning democracy, in Havel’s eyes. He specifically noted the weakness of spiritual life among people living in the Czech Republic, and we decided to investigate his claims made in a speech at Columbia University.

Havel’s words echoed in our minds and hearts, leading us to our next role in the Czech Republic, which was spiritual. We began to plan relocation to Prague, to be completed by 2010, in order to see what was really happening in the society, especially in the organizations that are traditionally associated with Czech spiritual life, including churches, monasteries and convents. We lived in Prague for nearly 4 years, observing and participating in such institutions and events as we could find which endeavored to give people spiritual sustenance. By no means, however, did we restrict ourselves to traditional institutions, as we found a vibrant spiritual community in Prague that exists outside the churches and their associated organizations.

We moved the ILI headquarters to Prague from August 2010-November 2013, living in that glorious city and doing all we could to understand the state of spiritual affairs there. The report, *Tusek Christian Mission to the Czech Republic: 2010-2014*, gives some background and preliminary conclusions, which will be woven into in our next book, *21st Century Christianity*. This book which will use our Prague experiences to make some statements about what the Church must do to remain relevant, so that people will listen to its message of hope and reconciliation with God.

All in all, we at ILI have built many meaningful and lasting relationships with people we’ve known and worked with in the Czech Republic. This country has been the focus of nearly everything we have done for 25 years, and we appreciate the opportunity to make a contribution to the lives of people who live there. We are grateful to all the people whose efforts made our involvement possible.

