



Leaders to Follow

In Prague, US President Bush Seeks Czech Support for Defense of Europe

By Sara Tusek

The Czech Republic and the US share ties that extend from the very establishment of Czechoslovakia after WWI.



Art Nouveau figures at Wilsonova Train Station, in Prague
(named for US President Woodrow Wilson)

US President Woodrow Wilson was a personal friend of T.G. Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia (1918-1935) and the man whose vision led to its creation from the dismembered Austro-Hungarian Empire, to which WWI had dealt the death blow.

Together, Wilson and Masaryk crafted a constitution for the new Czechoslovakia that featured many of the key values and propositions of the US constitution. Thus from its inception, Czechoslovakia (since 1993 the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic) has been a political and philosophical friend of the US.

End of the Cold War (1949—1989)

With the collapse of communism in central Europe in 1989, the Cold War lost its purpose. NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), originally established after WWII as a counter-

weight to the communist Warsaw Pact, reinvented itself as a kind of military association of various democracies and republics in Europe and North America, with mutual defense as the *raison d'être*.

In 1994 the Czech Republic joined NATO, accepting the strict standards of military preparedness and mutual aid required for such a step. This membership has been one factor in bringing back together the US and Czech Republic as friends and allies after some 40 years in which Czechoslovakia suffered totalitarian rule under communism.

Bush visits Prague

On June 4, 2007, President George Bush flew into Prague for a two-day visit on the way to the G-8 summit in Germany. He made a major address on June 5th, at a forum in Prague organized by Vaclav Havel, (Czech President from 1989—2003) along with leaders of the Prague Security Studies Institute, a non-profit group that promotes democracy and free markets in former soviet satellite states.

President Bush's remarks were aimed at strengthening the American bid to build a ballistic missile defense system in Europe, with radar installations in the Czech Republic.

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Bush Seeks Czech Support

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The system would track and identify missiles, and communicate that information to launch sites, such as the one proposed for Poland. The stated threat necessitating this system is the emerging nuclear capabilities of North Korea and Iran., as well as potential capabilities of rogue states in Central Asia.

This proposed bilateral agreement between the US and the Czech Republic has been endorsed by NATO, yet has met opposition, both in the Czech Republic (by some “ex”-communists) and, interestingly, in Russia, where President Vladimir Putin has expressed some fear and doubt as to the real reasons for placing the missile defense system in Europe. He has proposed Azerbaijan as an alternate site, but so far the US has not changed the plan.

“Freedom can be revisited, and freedom can be delayed , but freedom cannot be denied”

Bush’s speech, meant to remind the Czechs of their own commitment to freedom (as displayed in the events of 1989 during the Velvet Revolution) and claim the Czechs as partners in the worldwide endeavor to spread freedom everywhere, made reference to both Czech history and current Czech-American cooperation.

Bush spoke of Masaryk and of Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius), the 17th century “teacher of nations,” a bishop and a revered

figure in Czech history. Bush noted the democratic principles of the Czech First Republic, which was interrupted by Nazis and Communists but has been restored since 1989. He praised the Czechs for fighting for human rights in Cuba, and Belarus, and for their participation in the missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo.

In an historical aside, Bush quoted President Havel’s New Year’s address in 1990: “People, your government has returned to you!” and noted that Havel was echoing Masaryk, who was in turn quoting Comenius. “Freedom is the dream and the right of every person in every nation in every age,” Bush said.

While in Prague, Bush also shared his response to President Putin’s fears and doubts: “Vladimir (I call him Vladimir), the Cold War is over!”

On this happy and victorious note, Bush left for the G-8 summit. He had done his best to accurately present the American position and seek the support of the Czechs for the proposed missile defense system, while at the same time renewing and strengthening ties established nearly 90 years ago by Woodrow Wilson and T. G. Masaryk, a pair of idealists who thought that reason and justice were a good foundation for democracy. Fortunately, in the case of the Czech Republic, they were right.

ILI in Prague

Institute President Jarda Tusek visited Prague from May 9 to July 4. His visit included a reunion with *Business Leadership Forum: USA* graduates, and consultation with ILI TradeNet associate attorney Alan Tannenbaum of Sarasota (who was also in Prague), as well as business activities to help the Institute in its forthcoming transition to the Czech Republic. His arrival back in the States on the 4th of July merited fireworks—Jarda reports that he saw “his” fireworks from the plane, all the way from Atlanta to Jacksonville.



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