



Leaders to Follow

Prague Update #2: September 2007

By Sara Tusek

The Czechs are doing well—very well. The crown is rising in value against the dollar and major economic factors are positive. We at the Institute are very pleased at the remarkable progress the Czechs have made in just 17 years, and are confident that their thoroughness and precision will enable them to continue on the path to economic growth and the construction of a civil society. Commitment to democratic principles and practices, respect for human rights, and economic freedom are characteristic of the emerging “New European” identity that the Czechs share with all member states of the European Union.

Institute president Jarda Tusek just returned from a three-week visit to the Czech cities of Prague and Teplice, as well as Dresden, Germany (not far from Teplice). He accompanied a small group of friends on a trip to reconnect with (in the case of Americans Bob and Sierra Steele, who’d been in the Czech Republic in 2002) and be introduced to (in the case of Jarda’s old New York City friend Luis Blanco) the current Czech scene. Jarda was taking care of business as the Institute prepares for its move to the Czech Republic, now scheduled for June 2010.

POSITIVE CHANGES

Bob and Sierra, former members of Christ the Redeemer in Ponte Vedra, were impressed with the ways in which the Czechs have moved forward in their economy and in their attitude. Both the Steeles had greatly enjoyed their stay in 2002,

but Sierra had noted a lack of joy and spontaneity in the people she met. “I saw a large pile of beautiful autumn leaves and began to play in them,” Sierra says about a 2002 incident. “A woman was watching me, but hesitated to join me. I invited her with a smile, and she began to play, too.” This incident perfectly describes the native Czech reserve that must be overcome before the Czechs can fully enter into a new experience.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

In a similar way, the Czechs hesitated to enter the highly-competitive economic world market and the European Union, but have now found their niches. Automobile, aircraft and trolley bus assembly plants (Volkswagen has a large joint venture with Skoda in a small Czech town) are among the high-profile Czech export manufacturers; other exports include various

types of manufactured equipment and goods, chemicals and raw materials. Currently, major export markets include Germany, Slovakia, Russia and China.

With a 5.7% growth rate in 2007, and 4.8% predicted for 2008 by *The Economist*, the Czech Republic has a comfortable lead on the United States, whose comparable figures are 1.8% and 1.2%. Of course, the US is far more advanced economically, so it can’t

expect such impressive gains each year—nevertheless, it’s not such a shabby showing for a small country that only 17 years ago was still ruled by communist “demolition derby” economic practices.



Americans in Central Europe: Jarda Tusek, Luis Blanco, Bob Steele and Sierra Steele.

Photo courtesy Luis Blanco



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from p. 1

A GREAT PLACE TO TAKE PHOTOS!

Luis Blanco had a creative agenda for the trip: photos. Jarďa and Luis have been friends since the early 1980's, when Jarďa ran the Office of Career Services at New York Institute of Technology and Luis was a student there. Luis had heard for many years about Czechoslovakia, and developed a curiosity about a place so ruined yet so lovely.

When Institute president Jarďa Tusek

began, for business purposes, to visit the newly-capitalist country of Czechoslovakia in 1990 and the newly-created Czech Republic in 1993, Luis was intrigued. He kept in touch with Jarďa and eventually accompanied him on a visit to that fabled land of spas, pork and Good Soldier Svejk (the symbol of Czech passive resistance).

Luis was most enthusiastic with his Canon PowerShot, and contributed to the Institute archives with dozens of high-quality photos. He managed to capture many poignant scenes, alluding to the Czech past as well as its future. Nostalgia is big in the Czech Republic—you can find people who miss the old communist regime and want to have it back, as it provided a cocoon world (for at least the lucky few) that was completely outside of modern market-economy realities. Sometimes one is almost in awe of the communist ability to hold reality at bay for four-and-a-half decades in the heart of Europe. With hindsight and insight into 21st-century technology, we can see that surely the Internet alone would have



Jarďa, Luis and Svejk in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic—an unlikely trio! Photo courtesy Luis Blanco

been enough to destroy any economic-political system based on shielding citizens from the harshness of current economic practices and principles. It's merely an historic aberration that communism held on for so long, and the 1989 "velvet revolution" in retrospect, look to be not so much a revolution as the inevitable intrusion of economic facts. The world is, indeed, one large economy, for better and for worse, and no

country can put the brakes on that.

AND WHAT NEXT?

We at the Institute are now seeing the results of our interest in and commitment to the Czech Republic. In the 1990's, we made certain fairly optimistic predictions about the future of the Czech Republic. Much more quickly than we could have imagined, we are reaping what we sowed. The Czechs have done far better than we dared to hope; our investments there, both human and financial, have borne fruit we could never have foreseen. We are almost embarrassed at how well the Czechs have done, and at the seeming inevitability of their success. Who could have doubted it?

As we have been saying since the year 2000, we are firmly committed to a Czech future for the Institute. We are truly in awe of what the Czechs have done, and eagerly look forward to what lies ahead.

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