



February 2008

Assistant Secretary Barth: Visa Waiver Likely This Year

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Assistant Secretary Richard Barth reported excellent progress in the work that would enable Czech citizens to travel to the U.S. without a visa by the end of this year. Barth was visiting Prague February 6 to negotiate with Czech authorities a border security Memorandum of Understanding related to the new Visa Waiver Program legislation. According to Barth, who also visited Greece and Estonia, the last major hurdle in implementing reforms in the Visa Waiver Program remains the creation of an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) online process, which may be tested in the Czech Republic this summer. In 2007, some 35,000 Czech citizens applied for a tourist visa to visit the U.S.



Richard Barth and Ambassador Richard Graber (left) at a press conference in Prague February 6

Schengen Requirements Discussed at Open House for U.S. Citizens

Several hundred American citizens turned out to learn more about the services the Embassy provides American citizens at a February 12 Open House organized by the Consular Section. Ambassador Graber greeted the guests, and tables were set up to provide information on absentee voting, social security and the totalization agreement, and basic consular services for Americans. In addition, there was a representative from the Association of Americans Resident Overseas, an expatriate organization, and a representative from the Interior Ministry answered numerous questions about the Schengen zone. **The embassy will follow up with a special session March 3 solely on Schengen-related issues. Please watch for more details on the embassy website <http://prague.usembassy.gov/>.** The entry of the Czech Republic into the Schengen zone does not really affect Americans who have been working legally in the Czech Republic. Americans have always been required to have a work permit and a residency visa. However, because it could be difficult and time-consuming to obtain



Americans discussing social security benefits at the Open House in the American Center, Prague.

these documents, some Americans lived and worked here without them. Before Schengen, they used to be able to exit and re-enter the country every 90 days to maintain their legal status within the Czech Republic. Now, however, Schengen rules say that a non-EU citizen can only remain in the Schengen zone for 90 days within a six month (180-day) period. This means that Americans are obligated to fulfill Czech legal requirements for obtaining work permits and residence visas.

Ambassador Graber Talks about U.S. Elections, Visits Pribram



Ambassador Graber and Pribram Mayor Rihak in Pribram

Ambassador Richard Graber was interviewed by Czech Television and Czech Radio February 6, on the results of “Super Tuesday,” when 23 U.S. states held primaries to determine who would be Republican and Democratic candidates for president. He also discussed progress on Visa Waiver for the Czech Republic and ongoing missile defense negotiations. On February 11, Pribram Mayor Josef Rihak hosted a discussion between the Ambassador and mayors from neighboring municipalities on the Brdy foothills on the status of U.S.-Czech missile defense negotiations, U.S. investments linked to the radar, and its proven health and environmental record. The Ambassador was also interviewed by local media.

Czechs Prepare to Lead a Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan

Ramiro Rojas from the Department of Agriculture visited Prague January 25 to share his experience working on a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan with Czech civilian and military specialists who are preparing to lead the Czech Republic's first PRT effort in Logar province next month. Rojas noted that Logar is safer than southern Afghan provinces but not free of insurgent groups. He sees significant future opportunities for Czech businessmen in copper mining development and in providing veterinarian services in the region.



NATO troops in Afghani countryside

Concert Celebrates Strides Made for the Visually Impaired

Ambassador Graber hosted the *ImproVisions Jazz Quartet* at the U.S. Residence in February to honor the Czech organizations and volunteers working for and with visually impaired individuals. American pianist Michael Arnowitt, partially blind from the disease "retinitis pigmentosa", is touring Europe with the quartet and also performed at the Teplice Jazz Club. Prague jazz guitarist Tony Ackermann sat in on several numbers. The *ImproVisions Jazz Quartet*, which includes piano, tenor saxophone, bass and drums last performed in Prague in 2005 as part of the 29th International Jazz Festival.



Michael Arnowitt playing at the Ambassador's Residence

General O'Reilly Provides Technical Expertise on Radar

Deputy Director of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency General O'Reilly was in Prague to provide technical expertise during U.S.-Czech negotiations January 31 and

February 7. He also spoke about missile defense at the Prague Security Studies Institute and met with mayors from



General O'Reilly meets mayors from Brdy at the American Center

the Brdy area. Asked by Czech journalists whether the X-Band radar that may be located in Brdy would have any purpose beyond providing targeting information to interceptors in Poland, O'Reilly explained, "The radar is not only for the missiles in Poland. It contributes to all the short and medium range systems in Europe. It is not surveillance radar, but it helps all of these missile systems be able to more accurately track a ballistic missile." The chief U.S. and Czech negotiators announced February 7 that they are nearing completion of Ballistic Missile Defense negotiations, but negotiations on the Status of Forces agreement continue.

Czechs Share NATO Experience with Croatian Journalists



Croatian journalists pose with the Prague Castle in the background

A group of Croatian journalists and NGO representatives visited Prague on January 31 to learn about Czech experiences related NATO membership. During a program organized by the U.S. Embassies in Zagreb and Prague, participants spoke with representatives of the Czech ministries of defense and foreign affairs, NGOs, media and think tanks with first-hand experience in integrating into the Alliance. Croatia is expected to receive an official invitation to join NATO at the Bucharest summit in April 2008.

Upcoming Events

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| Feb. 27 | Workshop – Open Society. 09:00 a.m. – 03:00 p.m., American Center |
| March 18 | Discussion with Robert Greenstreet, urbanist. Residence Library |