



March 2008

## U.S. Election Speakers Captivate Czech Listeners

American media pundits Susan Spencer and Thomas Oliphant visited the Czech Republic March 17-18 to share their perspective of the upcoming **U.S. presidential elections** with Czech audiences. The two American journalists, a married couple, engaged audiences in a series of lectures at Czech universities, NGOs, the American Center in Pilsen and at the Prague Journalists' Syndicate. Oliphant also answered elections-related questions during a web chat on Aktualne.cz and both appeared on Czech TV.



*Oliphant and Spencer at the Prague Journalists' Syndicate*

Oliphant characterized the current run-up to November elections as one of the most exciting U.S. political events he has witnessed; he worked for the Boston Globe for 40 years. Spencer has been a correspondent for CBS television for a long time.

## Missile Defense Expert Robert Bell Highlights NATO Angle

U.S. Embassy Speaker Robert Bell, former NATO Assistant Secretary General and Clinton administration official, visited the Czech Republic March 6-7 for a series of lectures on U.S. missile defense for university students in Prague and Brno. Bell explained the reasons why Iran is



*Bell meeting with reporters at the American Center on March 6*

seen as a threat and said there is a need to work with Russia on the issue, although “without giving them the veto power.” Speaking with Czech journalists in Prague, Bell predicted the NATO summit in Bucharest (April 2-4) would provide the forum for members to start working on technical aspects and costs of **integrating the Alliance and U.S. missile defense systems**, but the final commitment to link the systems would most likely be made at next year’s commemoration of NATO’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Bell is now Senior Vice President of Science Applications International Corporation.

## Ambassador on Czech TV, and with Students in Pilsen

Upon his return from the United States, Ambassador Richard Graber was a guest on Czech Television’s morning news show “Dobre rano” on March 4. He was asked about his trip to the U.S. with Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek and the status of missile defense negotiations and visa waiver. On March 17, the Ambassador visited the University of Western Bohemia in Pilsen to speak with Czech political science students on U.S. elections and to meet with visiting American students from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The university in Pilsen has been a strong partner in U.S.-Czech student exchanges; the Marquette program for business students focuses on American and Czech company case studies.



*Students debating with the Ambassador in Pilsen*

The Ambassador, who is from Wisconsin, stressed the long-standing **relationship between the University of Western Bohemia and American institutions**, which began with U.S. government funding but now continues through the energetic efforts of UWB. Fulbright exchanges and other cooperation with the Embassy cement the close relationship. Back in Prague, Graber met March 13 with the editors-in-chiefs of the major Czech media and on March 21 with Czech governors to discuss current domestic issues and U.S.-Czech relations. The governors assured the Ambassador that they support locating a U.S. radar in the Czech Republic.

## Clarifying Schengen Rules for American Expats



On March 3, the U.S. Embassy and the Czech Ministry of Interior hosted a Schengen Forum for over 200 American Citizens residing in the Czech Republic to clarify Schengen rules and explore their impact on U.S. citizens' ability to reside in the Czech Republic and travel throughout the Schengen countries. Robert Solich, a representative of the Ministry of Interior's Schengen Office, and U.S. Deputy Consul General Mario Mesquita responded to specific concerns about the new rules. On March 10 the **Czech Ministry of Interior announced a grace period** for Americans and other nationals of non-Schengen states awaiting long-term visas. The grace period applies only to citizens of visa-free countries who applied for a long-term visa during their legal stay (i.e. within the first 3 months beginning Dec. 21, 2007), but have not received their visa due to processing procedures. It will be in effect until June 30, 2008. Czech police will not initiate expulsions of anyone falling within the grace period.

## U.S. Embassy Welcomes New American Center Director

The Embassy welcomes aboard **Miroslav Konvalina**, who is our new American Center Director since the beginning of March. Konvalina, a former Czech Radio correspondent to the U.S., admits his excitement about the new job: "The mission of the American Center is close to my heart. I very much want to contribute to mutual Czech-American understanding and the improvement of relations between both countries. I hope I will be able to combine the experience gained while working for the Czech Radio, in state administration, and in academia." American Center resources include new books on American foreign policy, security issues and history, American journals, magazines and electronic databases. The center also organizes seminars, movies, conferences, lectures, art exhibits and concerts.



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## Ambassador Congratulates Students on Their Business Savvy

Ambassador Graber participated in the opening ceremony of the 14th **International Trade Fair of Student Companies**, a Central European initiative that showcases the year-long work of students to Czech and international business professionals. Students create their fictional company goods, product lines, and services, and close contracts with other firms. The Trade Fair takes place

annually at the Vystaviste Exhibition Grounds in Prague. This year about 170 student companies participated in the fair. The Fair is co-sponsored by the Czech Ministry of Education, Prague City Hall and the U.S. Embassy. The first Trade Fair was organized in 1994.



*The fair grounds in Vystaviste, Prague*

## American Diplomat Discusses Current Issues with Students in Znojmo

U.S. diplomat Jerry Ismail visited Znojmo in mid-March under the Embassy's Speakers Bureau Program aimed at giving young audiences an opportunity to practice their English and discuss current issues and Czech-American relations with an American official. "The group at **Gymnázium Karla Polesného** was really engaged and asked a lot of good, tough questions -- everything from the prime minister's comments on U.S. detainees, to radar, and China's hosting the Olympics in light of the crackdown in Tibet. We also talked about the policy of recognizing Kosovo's independence," said Ismail. He added, "while discussing Missile Defense, we took a poll on the stationing of a radar on Czech soil; of the 50% who had an opinion, there was an even split between the pros and cons."

## Upcoming Events

April 10	Panel Discussion – Results of NATO Summit in Bucharest. 12:00, American Center
April 15	Workshop – Open Society, 08:00 a.m.-01:00 p.m., American Center
April 25	SPUSA Congress, 08:30 a.m. – 5 p.m., American Center
April. 29	U.S. presidential debate simulation, with AMO, 12:00, American Center
April 30	Native American Photography Presentation – Lee Marmon, 12:00 noon – 6:00 p.m., American Center

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