



November 2008

## Czechs Will Travel to the U.S. Without Visas Beginning November 17

The Czech Republic and other six countries will join the nations that participate in the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP). President George Bush announced the good news in mid-October and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff confirmed the specific date - November 17 - at the end of October in Prague. This program will make it much more convenient for most Czech citizens to travel to the U.S. This initiative was a priority for President Bush. The U.S. invitation to join the Visa Waiver Program recognizes the Czech Republic's increasing importance to the United States as a trade, cultural and security partner. "A lot of hard work and cooperation by people in the U.S. and Czech governments have made visa waiver a reality for Czech citizens. The Czech government has shown itself to be a good partner and the Czech people earned this privilege by proving during the last few years that they abide by the terms of their visas," said U.S. Ambassador Richard Graber.



The Visa Waiver program enables Czechs who up to now have travelled to the U.S. for business or as tourists to stay in the U.S. for up to 90 days without a visa. Czechs who propose to travel for any other purpose—for example to study or participate in work exchange programs—will still require a visa. Also note that anyone holding a valid visa can still use it to travel. In order to visit the U.S. without a visa, travelers need two things: a biometric passport and an on-line ESTA authorization, which we recommend they carry with them when they travel. ESTA stands for Electronic System for Travel Authorization. The system will in the vast majority of cases immediately indicate that the applicant's travel has been authorized. We encourage travelers to print out their authorizations and bring them to the airport. We recommend that people apply at least 3 days before they plan to travel. The ESTA authorization will be valid for two years, but if your passport expires, you have to apply again. For detailed information about participating in the visa waiver program, I encourage you to visit the U.S. Embassy's website: <http://prague.usembassy.gov> or <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

## Brdy Mayors Visit U.S. Base...

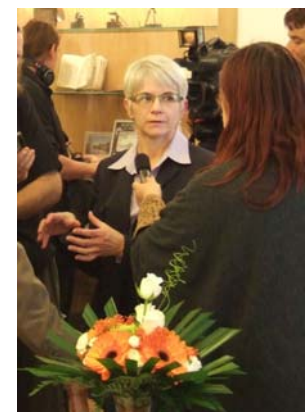
Nine mayors from towns and villages in the vicinity of the proposed U.S. missile defense radar site in the Brdy region visited Ramstein U.S. Air Force Base in southwestern Germany on October 8-9 with the objective to get in touch with both military and civilian communities accustomed to mutual cooperation.



The mayors asked questions to their hearts' content about how status of forces agreements (SOFA) are applied, how environmental concerns are addressed, how Germans feel about living adjacent to bases, how the military and local communities interact, etc. In return, they received very specific and detailed responses from U.S. military and German civilian authorities in Ramstein and the nearby Polygone Base. The embassy is confident that the mayors understand now that there will be open lines of communication and ample opportunities to express their opinions.

## ...and Alaskan Mayor Comes to Brdy

Mary Leith-Dowling, the mayor of the eastern Alaska town of Delta Junction, visited the Czech Republic at the beginning of October to share with parliamentarians, journalists and mayors of the Brdy region her community's experience with a nearby missile defense base at Ft Greely. Mary traveled to Příbram, the region's largest town, met with city representatives in the town hall and debated with students at the local high school. Apart from missile defense, they



wanted to learn more about Alaskan politics and Sarah Palin, the state Governor who ran as a Vice Presidential candidate on the Republican ticket. Mary then went to Rozmítal pod Třemšínem to talk to mayors from villages around the planned missile defense radar site and the media. "If the base were not here, we would be much a smaller town," she said and added that the military uses local schools, stores, restaurants and a library. "Half of our jobs are linked with the base," she noted.

## Under Secretary of Defense Discusses Shaky Regions

Under Secretary of Defense Eric Edelman was in Prague on October 21 to discuss with his Czech counterparts U.S.-



Czech cooperation, the war in Afghanistan and the situation in other unstable regions. On the recent conflict in the Caucasus, Edelman said, "I

am disturbed by the disproportionate force (Russia) used in Georgia. I would also like to underline that we cannot agree with the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We have been working since the end of the Cold War to make Russia our partner, not an enemy."

## Czech Historian Presents Book on Emigrants' Role in Founding Czechoslovakia

On the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Czechoslovak independence the American Center opened an exhibition of historic photographs and documents linked to the dramatic days of October 1918, during which the groundwork for the Czech nation was established. Keynote speaker at the exhibition opening on October 15 was historian Frantisek Hanzlik who, together with his friend from Brno's Defense University, Vaclav Vondrasek, presented a book entitled, "Expats in the U.S. and the Birth of Czechoslovakia." The exhibit will be open until early December.

## Ambassador Graber Takes Part in ICRC Brno Groundbreaking

On October 7, Ambassador Richard Graber was in Brno to take part in the groundbreaking ceremony for the International Clinical Research Center (ICRC), a cooperative project between the Mayo Clinic and St. Anne's University Hospital in Brno. The all-star cast of participants in the ceremony included Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, Minister of Health Tomáš Julínek, South Moravian Regional Governor Stanislav Juránek and Dr. Virend



Sommers of the Mayo Clinic. This unique medical research project is based on the International Space Station model and represents the Mayo Clinic's first large-scale

international collaboration. ICRC Brno will focus on cardiovascular and other state-of-the-art medical research. The Czech government has approved spending CZK 2.9 billion (USD 180 million) on the project, which is scheduled for completion in 2012. In his remarks at the ceremony, Ambassador Graber thanked the Czech government for welcoming the Mayo Clinic, a world-renowned U.S. health care organization. He recognized that the synergy between Czech and U.S. companies and academic and research institutions has meant more jobs and increased opportunities for Czech workers, students, and scientists.

## General Obering Bids His Farewell to CR

MDA Director Henry "Trey" Obering visited Prague on October 31 to say farewell to Czechs as he retires and to introduce his successor Patrick O'Reilly who will take over the office in December. Obering told the media that the U.S. elections will not affect the missile defense plans because the threat is real and missile defense tests have showed the system works. The financial crisis is also unlikely to influence the project, he said, since Congress already approved the program's funding for the next year. Obering signed the Framework Agreement at the Defense Ministry and promised that the U.S. will provide about USD 600,000 to fund the first three Czech scientific projects tied to missile defense cooperation. Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanová awarded Obering the State Defense Cross.



## Embassy Celebrates Saroyan's Anniversary

U.S. Embassy Prague partnered with the Embassy of Armenia to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of famous Armenian-American writer William Saroyan. Embassy officer John Law and the Ambassador of Armenia Ashot Hovakimian opened the multimedia evening, which featured accounts of Saroyan's career in America, his visits to Armenia and Czechoslovakia, photographs, articles and abstract paintings.

### Upcoming Events

- Nov. 12 AMO Discussion "Frozen Conflicts in Black Sea Region", American Center 10 a.m.
- Nov. 13 Lecture with Jiri Cernik: "Comanches in Texas", American Center, 5:30 pm.
- Nov. 21 Conference on EU-U.S. Summit, Foreign Ministry, 9 am.

<http://prague.usembassy.gov>