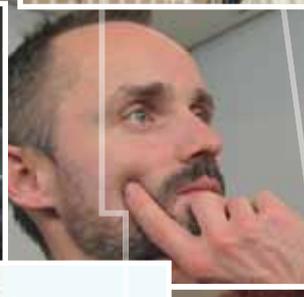


Pavol Demeš

A COLLECTIVE PORTRAIT







Pavol Demeš

A COLLECTIVE PORTRAIT
THE U.S. CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT
OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SLOVAKIA

To Ann and William Gardner

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_ FOREWORD

Theodore E. Russell

Founding Chairman, Friends of Slovakia

Former U.S. Ambassador to the Slovak Republic 1993-1996

Pavol Demeš is uniquely qualified to paint this "Collective Portrait" of U.S. support for Slovakia's civil society as he has probably been more involved than anyone else over the years since the Velvet Revolution in this successful effort. As his earlier work, "Friend, Partner, Ally" also confirms, Pavol Demeš is both a fine historian and a true champion of Slovak-American friendship.

As Deputy Chief of Mission in Prague and later as our first Ambassador in Bratislava I saw the American outpouring of enthusiasm for the success of the Czechs and Slovaks in sweeping out a sclerotic communist regime and moving towards democracy. Americans were determined to help in any way we could and, in a fashion typical of our international assistance efforts, the U.S. public and private sectors came together to do so. Private American foundations quickly mobilized funding for projects ranging from English teaching to assisting Slovak NGOs build their capacity to operate. Pavol Demeš clearly recounts how USAID Mission efforts in Slovakia were launched even before Slovakia became independent. Altogether, the United States provided over \$200 million to support Slovakia's development into a market-oriented democracy. This effort included assistance to advancing privatization and entrepreneurship through initiatives like the Slovak American Enterprise Fund, technical assistance to strengthen democratic structures at the local and national level and a democratic media and also support of quality of life including health care, housing and environmental programs. USAID delivered the bulk of this assistance through a legion of dedicated private and voluntary organizations. A key component of this U.S. government effort was strengthening Slovakia's NGO community via grants first channeled through U.S. NGOs like the Foundation for a Civil Society and later directly via Slovak NGOs.

U.S. and European Union support for Slovak democracy was based on requests by successive Slovak governments whose principal aim was Slovakia's integration into Western institutions including the EU and NATO. Support for building a civil society was integral to these efforts and proceeded vigorously despite ill-founded complaints by an increasingly authoritarian Mečiar government (1994-98) of Western interference. Pavol Demeš, as "Mr. Civil Society" in Slovakia and Foreign Policy Advisor to President Kováč played a challenging role with skill and determination during this period.

As Slovak democracy matured, USAID funding decreased substantially and the AID Mission closed definitively in March 2003. As Pavol Demeš points out, Slovakia is now a "normal" Western democracy and U.S. friend and ally. Based on its own experience, Slovakia is reaching out generously to help countries in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Middle East to strengthen their own civil societies.

Many Americans who worked enthusiastically to support Slovakia's democratic transformation have maintained ties with Slovakia. This was the genesis of Friends of Slovakia, a non-profit organization of volunteers who work to promote Slovak-American friendship and cooperation. Virtually all of the Friends of Slovakia leadership and many of our U.S. and Slovak members have played some personal role in supporting Slovak civil society over the years. They and a wider audience of American and Slovak readers will enjoy Pavol Demeš' lucid account of the cooperative efforts of Slovaks and public and private U.S. organizations to advance the cause of Slovak civil society. It is a heartening story with useful lessons for Americans and Slovaks on how to maintain and strengthen our respective democracies.

_ FOREWORD

Theodore Sedgwick

U.S. Ambassador to the Slovak Republic

In July of 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Mongolia launched a remarkable and visionary networking initiative that uses modern communication technologies to connect leaders in new democracies with key actors from countries that have recently and successfully transitioned from authoritarian regimes to open societies.

Secretary Clinton and the Mongolian President kicked off this LEND (Leaders Engaged in New Democracies) program in Ulan Bator. They were joined by the Moldovan Foreign Minister, speaking from a computer terminal in Georgia, and Pavol Demeš, the author of this book, speaking from a laptop at his home in Bratislava, Slovakia.

With so many countries newly struggling to create stable democratic institutions, the world needs this bold program now more than ever, and it is no surprise that Secretary Clinton chose Pavol Demeš to help kick it off.

In this book, Demeš tells the little-known story of how the United States provided crucial assistance to building civil society institutions in Slovakia that have stood the test of time and often strong official opposition. The story now comes full circle, with many of the same Slovak civil society leaders who built a strong third sector in their own country – Pavol Demeš, Martin Bútor, Rastislav Kužel, Dušan Ondrušek, Boris Strečanský, Filip Vagač and Zuzana Wienk – advising the LEND project and sharing their expertise around the world.

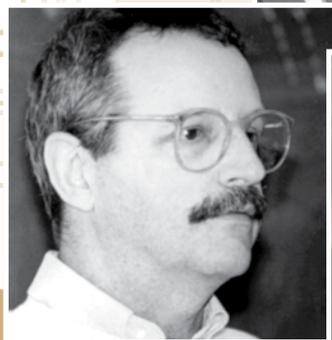
As Secretary Clinton so eloquently stated, "These three elements of a free nation – representative government, a well functioning market, and civil society – work like three legs of a stool. They lift and support nations as they reach for higher standards of progress and prosperity."

Along with the government and business sectors, civil society is one of the pillars that buttress a modern democratic society. After the Velvet Revolution, civil society organizations played a crucial role in building an open society and facilitating Slovakia's integration into European and transatlantic structures. Most analysts and representatives of the non-profit sector agree that the United States of America has played a decisive role in the emergence and development of modern civil society in Slovakia. U.S. assistance took the form of various volunteer, foundation, non-governmental and government-sponsored programs. That assistance left an unmistakable stamp on Slovakia's third sector, and many partnerships it helped establish continue until the present day.

The twentieth anniversary of the emergence of the independent Slovak Republic naturally urges one to look back in an attempt to appraise what has been achieved. The following text represents a personal view of the subject but is by no means an exhaustive treatment of the topic. Against the backdrop of socio-political developments in particular periods of modern Slovakia's short history, this publication strives to capture examples of U.S. assistance and describe their characteristic hallmarks. The author believes that the colorful story of the emergence and development of modern civil society in Slovakia and the role played in the process by the United States may serve as the source of instruction and inspiration in seeking answers to urgent contemporary issues, and not only in Slovakia.

(1989-1993)

• From the Velvet Revolution to the independent Slovakia



Annus mirabilis or the year of miracles of 1989 brought an unexpected change of regime also in Czechoslovakia. The spark of the Velvet Revolution flared up on 17 November when police batons violently dispersed a peaceful demonstration of students who gathered in Prague on the occasion of International Students' Day to demand civil freedoms and respect for human rights. It was this day that inspired people with the courage to dismantle the totalitarian regime that had been controlled by the Communist Party for over forty years. Within several weeks, non-violent protests led by students, dissidents and people from cultural, educational and academic institutions forced the Communist Party to capitulate, opening space for the participation of non-party representatives in government and the gradual development of pluralistic democracy. In Prague the pivotal revolutionary force was the Civic Forum, a movement whose most visible representatives were Václav Havel and Jiří Dientsbier, leaders of the Charter 77 dissident organization. In Bratislava, the Public against Violence (VPN) emerged under the leadership of dissident environmentalist Ján Budaj, actor Milan Kňažko, and many other personalities of the fledgling anti-communist opposition.

The Iron Curtain fell and citizens as well as state institutions began to communicate freely with the democratic world, including the United States, which the communist regime had viewed for decades as its sworn enemy.

Immediately after the collapse of communism, U.S.-Czechoslovak relations developed in an atmosphere of mutual fascination, accompanied by the rapid establishment of contacts on the political and civic level. America as the symbol of freedom became a source of inspiration in Czechoslovakia. Similarly, the United States was inspired by the example of the Velvet Revolution, in which seemingly powerless citizens conquered totalitarianism in a peaceful manner. The nature of the revolution, combined with the courage and the unusual creativity of Václav Havel, the new president of the now free Czechoslovakia, helped arouse an unprecedented level of interest from the overseas superpower in a small Central European country.

The first Americans willing to extend a helping hand arrived in Czechoslovakia already in late 1989. They hailed from all walks of life and a variety of professional backgrounds, including governmental, non-governmental, educational, academic, cultural, and compatriot organizations; their principal interest was to ascertain the country's priorities during its transition to a new political system. The U.S. Embassy in Prague soon established new organizations specializing in development aid aimed in part at supporting civil society. In spring 1991, the United States opened a consulate in Bratislava, putting Paul Hacker in charge. In October of that same year, the consulate opened a United States Information Service (USIS) library that was led by Beth Richie Poisson. In January 1992, Patricia Lerner arrived in Bratislava to open a key organization of American governmental assistance, namely the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Setting flight across the ocean were hundreds of Czechoslovak citizens who had learned about the United States only from films, books, eavesdropped radio stations such as the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe or tales from the sizeable community of Czechoslovak emigrants. In these times, thanks in large part to significant assistance from American institutions and individuals, the seeds of modern civil society in Slovakia were sown. Its value and organizational foundation was laid in this period.

The emergence of new political subjects and the ensuing competition among them led to some surprises, particularly when reconciliation with the nation's totalitarian past and transformation difficulties were added to the mixture of challenges. Several leading personalities of the Velvet Revolution were forced to leave politics. Nationalist and populist tendencies soon prevailed on the Slovak political scene, manifested in part through attacks on Americans who allegedly "meddled in Slovakia's internal affairs." The populists from Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) that split from the VPN in spring 1991 as well as the nationalists from the Slovak National Party (SNS) targeted their propaganda most of all at financier-philanthropist George Soros and the civil society organizations that he supported.

Gradually, leaders of the Czech and Slovak political scene began to wrangle over the distribution of power within the common federative state. The parliamentary elections in June 1992 brought to power two dominant political figures: Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic and Mečiar in Slovakia. Following a series of fruitless negotiations regarding the future shape of the common

state, the two national prime ministers persuaded members of the federal parliament to vote in favor of the peaceful dismantling of Czechoslovakia. On 1 January 1993, approximately three years after the Velvet Revolution, the two nations underwent a "Velvet Divorce" that left them neither antagonized nor bitter as was the case in the breakup of Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union.

EXAMPLES OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (1989–1993)

Charter 77 Foundation

This foundation was established in Stockholm in 1978, long before the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. During the first decade of its existence, the foundation was financially supported by a great number of individuals and organizations from Europe and overseas, with George Soros ranking among the most generous benefactors. The foundation's original mission was to maintain independent thought and culture in Czechoslovakia through supporting samizdat literature and individuals who were politically persecuted.

In December 1989, just after the initial shift toward democratization, the foundation began to operate in Czechoslovakia, opening offices in Prague and Bratislava. Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, two separate foundations were established. From its early beginnings until the present day, the Bratislava headquarters of the Charter 77 Foundation has been led by Zuzana Szatmáry, who won the Women of Europe award bestowed by the European Union (EU) in 1993.

The foundation played a historic role in Czechoslovakia's democratic transformation and was at the cradle of modern civil society in Slovakia. The building on Staromestská 6 in Bratislava that had previously accommodated classrooms for apparatchiks of the Communist Party became the headquarters of the foundation along with a handful of budding non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and publishing houses. In cooperation with Vladimír Raiman, a representative of the European Cultural Foundation,

the Charter 77 Foundation began to publish NonProfit, the first magazine devoted to issues concerning non-governmental organizations.

Until the end of 1992 when the Open Society Fund (OSF) Bratislava was founded (that organization changed its name to Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti-Open Society Foundation in 1997), the Charter 77 Foundation distributed all funds channeled to Slovakia by George Soros. That included support for emerging NGOs as well as the OSF's own projects, such as seminars, conferences, stays of dissidents' children in the United States, scholarships for secondary school students at U.S. schools, study trips by members of the Slovak parliament. Nowadays, the foundation specializes mainly in providing free civil counseling inspired by the American tradition of pro bono legal aid. Its headquarters are still at Staromestská 6.



Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA)

- *The Union of University Students of Slovakia was given a special award by the Slovak Parliament in 1990 for their contribution to the Velvet Revolution. Slovak-American John Hvasta (fourth from left), who was helping students obtain stipends for study in the United States, was among the guests. Photo: author's archive*

A special contribution to the development of civil society in Slovakia was brought by the Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA), a civic association that was founded several months after the Velvet Revolution based on the initiative of university students and employees at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports who began to work there after the change of regime. Minister Ladislav Kováč and State Secretary Ján Pišút allowed the team at the Department of International Cooperation led by Pavol Demeš to develop full-fledged cooperation with the West. At this point, the interest in "discovering America" was enormous in Slovakia, unfolding along civic, academic and governmental

lines. At that time, Bratislava did not have a Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a U.S. diplomatic mission. The Ministry of Education and SAIA assisted in the conception of many American-Slovak projects that often went beyond the framework of education. For instance, the Fulbright Commission established offices simultaneously in Prague and Bratislava, marking the first time that the U.S. Government established two missions of this important program in a single country.

These activities of the Education Ministry would have been unthinkable without the personal commitment of many domestic and foreign experts. A special place among them is held by David P. Daniel, a Slovak American who arrived in Slovakia before the Velvet Revolution as a historian on a Fulbright scholarship and became an advisor at the Ministry of Education after the tables turned. Skilled and selfless, Daniel played a pivotal role in founding SAIA and establishing its informational, educational and team building role for Slovakia's third sector. In spring 1990 he co-organized the first trip to the United States of a Slovak delegation comprising student revolutionary leaders (Svetoslav Bombík, Anton Popovič, Vladimír Puchala, Boris Strečanský and Tomáš Hrivnák), academics (Soňa Szomolányi and Pavol Brunovský) and Education Ministry employees (Vladimír Cholvád, Daniel and Demeš). Daniel was also instrumental in organizing the first Stupava Conference, which later evolved into a regular platform of Slovak NGOs, as well as other initiatives that formed the DNA of the country's civil society.

The Ministry of Education and SAIA employees also helped establish the Foundation for the Foreign Education of Slovak Citizens, which in initial years following the political change helped materialize many students' dreams of studying abroad by supporting their study trips to American universities.

Foundation for a Civil Society (FCS) and Wendy Luers

The FCS was founded in 1990 in the United States under the original name of Charter 77 Foundation New York. Two years later, it changed its name to the Foundation for a Civil Society. Its founder and sole president until the present day is Wendy Luers, the wife of former U.S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia William Luers (1983–86). Capitalizing on her familiarity with

Czechoslovak life and institutions as well as the endowment and political landscape of the United States, the energetic Mrs. Luers initiated a great number of projects aimed at supporting reform efforts after 1989. The FCS brought to Czechoslovakia constitutional law experts, advisors for the state administration, media and NGOs as well as English language lecturers (Masaryk fellows). Luers was also instrumental in procuring a number of scholarships for secondary school students and talented artists in the United States, as well as in popularizing the Czech and Slovak Republics overseas. For her activities, the first Slovak President Michal Kováč awarded Luers a state honor.

In 1997 the two FCS branches on the territory of former Czechoslovakia changed their status into separate and successful foundations – the Prague office became the Via Foundation and the Bratislava one became the Pontis Foundation. Throughout her mission in Slovakia, Wendy Luers relied on the talent and tenacity of young leaders such as FCS/Pontis directors Carrie Slease, Robert Vlašič and Lenka Surotchak. An important role in the strategic and program development of the FCS/Pontis was also played by an American with Slovak roots, Jan Eric Surotchak.

- *Wendy Luers, president, Foundation for a Civil Society.*





Education for Democracy/USA and Ann Gardner

- *Ann Gardner, former founder and president of the volunteer program, Education for Democracy/USA.*

The population's interest in learning English language increased dramatically after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and it seemed impossible to compensate for the shortage of qualified English teachers. The largest and one of the most successful English teaching programs in the first half of the 1990s was Education for Democracy/USA (EFD), which brought to Slovakia over 1,000 volunteers of different age and professions from around the United States as well as Canada (for instance John Hasek, who was the instigator of the idea) and Great Britain. Ann Gardner of Mobile, Alabama was the founder and president of EFD/USA, and she launched the program in early 1990 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and SAIA. In Slovakia, the program was coordinated by Katarína Košťálová, Anna Hruškovičová and Soňa Korbašová (née Sulíková).

EFD lecturers taught English at all types of schools as well as in various enterprises and institutions around Slovakia. The EFD program not only helped spread information about the United States in Slovakia but also introduced Slovakia to the American public on an informal basis. Many contacts and friendships established during this volunteer program have survived until today: former EFD volunteer lecturer Sharon Fisher continues to collaborate with various Slovak NGOs and sits on the board of directors of Friends of Slovakia; Carrie Sleese went on to become director of the Foundation for a Civil Society; Richard

Lewis with his American partners (Rick Zedník, Daniel Stoll, and Eric Koomen) in 1995 founded The Slovak Spectator, a fortnightly-turned-weekly that continues to be a respected and valuable source of information on Slovakia in English.

- Sharon Fisher, former EFD/USA volunteer, currently on the Board of Directors of Friends of Slovakia.



- Richard Lewis (left), former volunteer teacher of English and co-founder of the Slovak Spectator, an English-language weekly.
Photo: author's archive

The First International Conference of Foundations and the Non-Profit Sector

This conference, which was the first of its kind in Central and Eastern Europe, took place on 23-25 August 1990, at the Bôrik hotel in Bratislava. It was jointly organized by the Faculty of Law at Comenius University the Slovak Ministry of Education, and two American foundations: the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Charter 77 Foundation New York. Attended by over 50 legal and endowment experts from 11 countries, the conference was

jointly presided over by Comenius University Rector Miroslav Kusý and Rockefeller Brothers Fund President Colin G. Campbell.

The conference discussed basic organizational issues concerning civil society, with a special emphasis on creating favorable legislative conditions for the effective operation of non-profit organizations, which had begun to develop rapidly in post-communist Europe.

For Slovakia and its budding third sector, this conference was of essential importance especially in terms of introducing new notions and concepts that were indispensable in creating a legal framework for the functioning of NGOs as well as establishing contacts with partners from around the region and in the United States. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund officials (namely William Moody) effectively discovered Slovakia, and in the following years the organization – along with the C.S. Mott Foundation (President William S. White), Atlantic Philanthropies (CEO John Healy, program coordinator Ray Murphy), the German Marshall Fund (President Frank Loy, since 1995 Craig Kennedy), Ford Foundation (Vice-President Barry Gaberman, program coordinator Irena Grudzińska Gross) and other American foundations – played a pivotal role in catalyzing the development of the third sector in Slovakia, especially through strengthening its management, information and advocacy capacities.

"Volunteers for Education in Central Europe" – the first international conference of volunteers in Slovakia

On 6–9 December 1990, the castle in Tonkovce, a little village near Bratislava, hosted a conference devoted to foreign volunteers and volunteer programs that had begun to develop rapidly following the series of democratic changes. Organized by the Slovak Ministry of Education, the symposium was attended by approximately 50 participants from seven countries, including volunteer English lecturers from the USA and coordinators of four major American volunteer programs, namely Ann Gardner from Education for Democracy/USA, Anne Clunan from Students for Czecho-Slovakia (this program also brought to Slovakia Janet Livingstone who settled here in 2002 and today collaborates with various Slovak NGOs), Francis Luzzatto from Citizens Democracy Corps and Stephan Hanchey from the Peace Corps,



- *Stephan Hanchey, the first Peace Corps Director in Czechoslovakia. Tonkovce, 1990.
Photo: author's archive*

which at the time was just about to take off in Slovakia. The Tonkovce conference provided a platform for comparing the experiences of foreign volunteers and establishing mechanisms of cooperation among particular programs implemented by non-governmental as well as governmental institutions.



- *American volunteers who came to teach English in Slovakia at a conference in Tonkovce, 1990. Photo: author's archive*

- *Looking at the map of Slovakia: (l.-r.) Colin G. Campbell, president, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Juraj Mesík, director, EPCE Slovakia and Frank Loy, president, German Marshall Fund. Banská Bystrica, 1994. Photo: archive of Ekopolis Foundation*





- *George Soros, founder, Open Society Institute.*

Open Society Foundation and George Soros

A native of Budapest, a Wall Street financial wizard, a philanthropist and a tireless promoter of the concept of open society, George Soros has played a fundamental role in the development of democracy and civil society in Slovakia. His noble-minded concept of promoting critical thought, education, culture, and justice, while also supporting marginalized groups and international cooperation took roots in Czechoslovakia already in the communist era but did not thrive until after the Velvet Revolution (see the above section on the Charter 77 Foundation). Soros first arrived in Bratislava in December 1989 when he established contacts with leaders of Public against Violence. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, his Open Society Institute gradually established national open society foundations in all post-communist countries, and

he entrusted the task of founding the OSF Bratislava to Rachel Tritt, a young and dynamic American who had originally come to Slovakia to teach English. The foundation was officially registered in Bratislava in November 1992, and Tritt became its first director. In 1995 she was replaced by Program Manager Alena Pániková, who has remained in charge until the present day.

In terms of the overall volume of disbursed grants as well as the scope of its own programs, OSF Bratislava is the largest foundation in Slovakia's modern history. The ruling elite's attitude toward Soros and the OSF has served as a relatively reliable indicator of the character of governance in Slovakia over the past two decades.

- *William White, president, C.S. Mott Foundation.*



Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (EPCE)

A noteworthy example of U.S. foundations' cooperation in post-communist Europe is the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (EPCE), a project launched in 1991 that was managed from Prague by Susan Cleveland until summer 1993. Following an extensive tour of Central and East European countries, leading representatives of three American foundations, namely the C.S. Mott Foundation (Program Manager John Blyth), the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (Program Manager Bill Moody) and the German Marshall Fund (Program Manager Marianne Ginsburg) identified as a top priority financial support of projects in the field of environment, community development, and local democracy. The foundations agreed to create a consortium whose members would closely cooperate with each other while relying on the talent of local people. Initially, the chief EPCE coordinator in Slovakia was Helena Forrová-Zamkovská. After the break-up of Czechoslovakia, EPCE Slovakia was based in Banská Bystrica and its director became Juraj Mesík; under his leadership, EPCE Slovakia evolved into a progressive granting organization that helped give birth to many projects and civic initiatives in regions and communities around the country.

The American donors attached great importance to the sustainability of national EPCE teams, which is why they encouraged them to stand on their own feet. In 1996, EPCE Slovakia

changed its status to a separate granting foundation that under the name of Ekopolis gradually became one of the most successful granting foundations in Slovakia. From 2002 until now, the foundation's director has been Peter Medved'. Juraj Mesík, for his part, has become a pioneer in the field of community philanthropy in Slovakia as well as in Europe, thanks largely to his experience gained in the United States, namely during a study trip to Michigan.

Environmental Training Project (ETP)

Among the first post-November environmental projects conceived in cooperation with the United States is the Environmental Training Project (ETP), an educational program that was launched in Eastern Slovakia in 1992 and later gained a nationwide character. Led by Boris Strečanský, one of student leaders of the Velvet Revolution, the ETP provided managerial training to non-profit organizations, self-governments and small and medium-sized firms that specialized in environmental protection. Managed by the University of Minnesota and financed by USAID, the program focused on providing training courses and extending grants to projects aimed at developing managerial skills and competence. Along with other ETP colleagues and lecturers, Strečanský in 1995 established the ETP Slovakia foundation with its headquarters in Bratislava and a branch office in Košice.

- Dušan Ondrušek, director, Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia.
Photo: Ľuboš Hrivčák



Partners for Democratic Change (PDC)

Having founded Partners for Democratic Change (PDC) in the United States two years earlier, an inconspicuous visionary named Raymond Schoholtz from California arrived in Slovakia in 1991 to look for a personality from the academic environment who would be interested in long-term systematic work in the field of conflict prevention and the development of human resources in project management. He had a lucky hand in picking Dušan Ondrušek, a young psychologist at Comenius University with whom he founded PDC Slovakia (PDCS) in 1994. Since then, professional PDCS trainers have played a crucial role in strengthening management capacities of Slovak NGOs and their leaders' managerial skills. They still organize various NGO meetings and pursue their activities in all corners of the world. Moreover, they have compiled a number of publications and handbooks focusing on various aspects of civil society, some of which have been translated into foreign languages.

The first Stupava Conference

The birth of the tradition that has representatives of the country's third sector regularly meeting at so-called Stupava conferences dates back to October 1991 when Zuzana Szatmáry (Charter 77 Foundation), David P. Daniel (SAIA), Miroslav Pospíšil (Jan Hus Educational Foundation in Brno) and Vladimír Raiman (European Cultural Foundation) initiated the first conference of Czech and Slovak NGOs in the town of Stupava near Bratislava. It was attended by 34 participants from the Czech Republic, 24 from Slovakia and 20 guests from abroad. The conference was organized by SAIA, which gradually evolved into a nationwide organization that provided training activities and information to the fledgling non-profit sector. The second Stupava conference was not held until March 1994 (i.e. after the split of former Czechoslovakia) as a conference of Slovak NGOs.

U.S. Information Service (USIS)

A library open to the general public was a key part of this U.S. Government agency, which operated in Slovakia through the consulate and later through the embassy. The USIS organized very



- *Beth Richie Poisson, the first USIS Director in Slovakia: (l.-r.) John Evans, deputy chief of mission, U.S. Embassy to Czechoslovakia, Paul Hacker, U.S. Consul General, Slovakia, Beth Richie Poisson and David P. Daniel, director, SAIA, Bratislava, 1992.*
Photo: author's archive

popular study trips of Slovak experts in the United States as well as lectures and stays of American specialists in various institutions in Slovakia. It also supported the presentation of American art, which was quite deficient in the country during the previous regime. Moreover, the agency provided and administered grants for Slovak NGO projects aimed at promoting democracy, an independent judiciary, a market economy and freedom of speech. The USIS paid special attention to the fledgling independent media through the provision of grants and the organization of study trips in the United States. In those efforts, the agency cooperated with specialized U.S. foundations such as the International Media Fund (led by President Marvin Stone) and the Independent Journalism Foundation (led by President James L. Greenfield who in 1993 helped establish the Center of Independent Journalism in Slovakia). In 1999, the USIS was incorporated into the U.S. State Department.

Fulbright Commission

In June 1991, representatives of the Czechoslovak and U.S. governments signed in Prague a bilateral agreement to establish Fulbright Commission branches in Prague and Bratislava, making Czechoslovakia part of the network of countries that participated in one of the world's largest exchange programs. Established in 1946 based on the initiative by Senator J. William Fulbright, this government-sponsored program allows top

experts from around the world to obtain scholarships and subsequently gain and share knowledge at prestigious institutions in the United States, while also sending U.S. experts around the world. The first director of the Fulbright Commission in Slovakia was Adriena Richterová; in 1993, she was replaced by Nora Hložeková who has remained in charge until today. Between 1992 and 2012, the Fulbright Commission sponsored the study trips of 270 U.S. experts to Slovakia and 275 Slovaks to the United States. The latter group included several NGO experts such as Slavomíra Mačáková, Lenka Jasenčáková, Ľubomír Okruhlica, Iveta Radičová, Mikuláš Huba, Jaroslav Tešliar, Daniela Olejárová, Danica Klemková, Lea Uhrínová, Michal Vašečka, and others.

Eisenhower Fellowships

In 1992, SAIA acted as a co-organizer and administrative center of the selection procedure that was supposed to choose the first batch of ten experts between 32 and 45 from the entire Czechoslovak Federation to obtain Eisenhower Fellowships, a special two-month stay in the United States. Since then, participants of this non-governmental program established in 1953 and bearing the name of former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower has included several leaders of Slovakia's non-profit sector, including Juraj Mesík, Šarlota Pufflerová, Mikuláš Huba, and Zuzana Wienk.

_ BASIC HALLMARKS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (1989–1993)

The birth of U.S. assistance following the collapse of communism in Czechoslovakia was spontaneous and prompt. The quickest to react to the call for cooperation and assistance in building civil society and volunteerism were private foundations and individuals. Shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the U.S. Congress passed the Support for East European Democracy Act (SEED) of 1989 that provided the legal framework for the U.S. Government's support of fundamental socio-political and economic reforms in post-communist countries. Private as well as

public programs took into account the specifics of the Czech and Slovak Republics and adjusted the coordination of their activities accordingly.

Americans brought new attitudes to life that were oriented at strengthening the role of individuals, the spirit of volunteerism, solidarity, and service to one's immediate environment. Besides assistance in reforming the country's political and economic system, U.S. donors also paid significant attention to the development of civil society. No other Western country invested as much money and expertise into fledgling civic initiatives and organizations in Slovakia as the United States. However, it was not just financial and material assistance; a crucial role was also played by the hundreds of American volunteers who came to Slovakia to teach English and help found NGOs, often without pay.

Unusual for most Slovaks was also the confidence that American foundations in particular placed in people who decided to take part in reshaping the system and creating the new culture of civic participation. The assistance in the form of grants was free of undue bureaucracy and based primarily on appreciating the talents of the local people.

From the very outset, the donors emphasized the temporary nature of their support and tried to aim their assistance at encouraging cooperation among civil society actors, the creation of alliances and sustainable organizations. Many members of Slovakia's budding civil society were able to become personally acquainted with the functioning of the non-profit sector in the United States.

(1993–1998)

- Initial years of independent statehood and the period of Mečiarism



After 1 January 1993, Slovakia began to strengthen its statehood by building political, economic, and social infrastructure and joining international institutions. Despite initial fears regarding Slovakia's viability and the potential for destabilization of the entire Central European region, Slovakia quickly won recognition on the international scene. The administration led by Vladimír Mečiar declared it wanted to build a pluralistic democratic state with a free market economy and to join European and transatlantic structures as soon as possible.

The first president of the new state became Michal Kováč, a parliamentary deputy and party colleague of Prime Minister Mečiar who was elected to the post by the National Council of the Slovak Republic in March 1993. Relations between the two constitutional officials soon grew into fierce quarrels, which very negatively affected the country's socio-political atmosphere as well as its image abroad in early years of its existence.

Despite declarations about his commitment to European democratic principles, Mečiar gradually began to deviate from them and increasingly focused on centralizing power in his own hands. A skilled politician, he portrayed himself as "father of the nation" and drummed up unprecedented public support on the back of attacking the political opposition as well as critics within his own party. Mečiar tried to gain control over the economy, the media, trade unions and NGOs. When President Kováč publicly criticized his authoritarian tendencies, Mečiar turned his wrath on the president. Their conflict peaked with the brutal abduction of Kováč's son by employees of the Slovak Intelligence Service. The regime that Mečiar tried to establish in Slovakia was later dubbed as "Mečiarism".

Due to the overtly undemocratic practices of Prime Minister Mečiar, Slovakia received demarches from the EU as well as the U.S. government and was subsequently eliminated from accession negotiations with the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Meanwhile, the country's neighbors from the Visegrad Four – namely the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland – maintained their integration course.

Mečiar's style of governance and the looming risk of international isolation spurred into action democratic forces that became aware of the catastrophic effects of such actions on the country's future development. The chance for a change came with the parliamentary elections of 1998 in which Slovak NGOs played a truly historic role. They joined forces in organizing a nationwide information, education, and mobilization drive known as Civic Campaign 98 (Občianska kampaň 98 – OK98), which helped increase voter participation to 84 percent. Turnout among democratically-oriented first-time voters was almost identical to the overall figure, an unprecedented level. While civil society representatives communicated with leaders of the political opposition prior to the elections through so-called democratic roundtables, they strictly adhered to the principle of non-partisanship. It was before the 1998 elections that the tradition of broad civic participation in the political arena was born in Slovakia, and the country's third sector won respect at home as well as abroad.

Although Mečiar's party managed to win the parliamentary elections in September 1998 by a narrow margin, he was unable to form a new government and was forced into the opposition, leaving space for the establishment of a coalition government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda.

EXAMPLES OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (1993–1998)

National Service Center for the Third Sector

The Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA) grew increasingly independent and gradually evolved into a separate civic association with a network of branches in all seven regional capitals of Slovakia plus the town of Poprad. Under the joint leadership of Pavol Demeš, David P. Daniel, Katarína Košťálová and Oľga Šubeníková, SAIA became an internationally recognized organization. All regional branches were managed by female directors: Zuzana Kalináčová in Košice, Danica Hulová in Banská Bystrica, Ľubica Lachká in Nitra, Dagmar Lišková in Trenčín, Libuša Radková in Trnava, Juliana Hajduková in Prešov, Alena Mičicová in Žilina and Dana Plučinská in Poprad.

- *The leaders of SAIA: (l.-r.) Pavol Demeš (former director), Olga Šubeníková (deputy director), Katarína Košťálová (director) and David P. Daniel (former director), Bratislava, 2000. Photo: author's archive*



- *Thomas McClure, NGO trainer, Support Centers International, Washington.*

Besides projects aimed at international education, SAIA increasingly focused on serving the rapidly developing third sector, which led to extending its name to SAIA-Service Center for the Third Sector (SCTS). Consequently, it began to specialize in training (for example, management training courses for non-profit leaders), IT (the creation of NGO databases), publishing (NGO directories, analytical and training manuals, the NonProfit monthly) and organizational activities (Stupava conferences, servicing the Gremium of the Third Sector). SAIA also organized extensive programs for volunteer English lecturers (particularly Education for Democracy) and facilitated book donations from the Sabre Foundation and the International Book Bank.

In developing information and educational programs for the third sector, SAIA-SCTS closely cooperated with specialized U.S. organizations such as Support Centers International (Thomas McClure), Citizens Democracy Corps USA (Francis Luzzatto), the National Forum Foundation (James Denton), the Toshiba America Foundation (John M. Sumanski), the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies (Lester Salamon), the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (Lee Irish, Douglas Rutzen, Stephan Klingelhofer), the National Center for Nonprofit Boards (Eliana Vera), and CIVICUS (Miklós Marschall).

In March 1998, SAIA-SCTS in cooperation with the Open Society Institute began to develop a Volunteer Center that soon joined an international network of similar centers in Central and East



European countries. Since 1999, it has bestowed the "Heart on the Sleeve" award to extraordinary volunteers.

The extensive development of SAIA-SCTS activities would have been unthinkable without the support of U.S. foundations such as the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Foundation for a Civil Society. As the period of Mečiarism was culminating, the OSF salvaged the academic programs run by SAIA-SCTS.

Open Society Fund

During this period, the foundation established in late 1992 and supported by George Soros fully developed its wide spectrum of activities aimed at developing the non-governmental sector, furthering political reforms, protecting human rights, supporting programs in the field of education, culture, health care and the media, and promoting international cooperation. In addition to pursuing its own projects, the OSF also extended grants, particularly to NGOs. It became a new type of granting-operating organization whose activities involve a great number of collaborators and specialists from various fields of expertise.

- *Lester Salamon, director, Institute for Policy Studies, Johns Hopkins University.*

- *Rachel Tritt, director, Open Society Fund Slovakia.
Photo: author's archive*





From the very outset, the foundation placed great emphasis on the transparency of its activities and establishing cooperation with other subjects from the non-governmental as well as governmental sectors (including educational, medical, and cultural organizations). It has played a crucial role in promoting the culture of philanthropy in Slovakia, creating third-sector alliances (including the Donors Forum) and breeding new NGOs. The OSF gave birth to a number of NGOs that gradually became independent organizations, including the Foundation-Center for Contemporary Arts, the Wide Open School Foundation (Škola dokorán), the Plan B non-profit organization, the Open Medical Club, the Slovak Debate Association, and the Slovak-Czech Women's Fund.

- *Rick Little, founder and president, International Youth Foundation.*

Children of Slovakia Foundation

Rick Little is a remarkable American who deserves big credit for focusing attention on children and young people on a global scale. In 1990 he established an innovative foundation called the International Youth Foundation (IYF). Subsequently, he initiated the establishment of separate partner foundations around the world, including the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Following a cautious viability study, Slovakia also appeared on the IYF map; Maggie Alexander was among those who helped scout conditions for establishing a partner foundation in this region. In 1995, the Children of Slovakia Foundation was officially registered in Bratislava under the leadership of Filip Vagač. From the very beginning, the IYF encouraged its Slovak partner to emphasize the principles of inter-sectoral cooperation and sustainability, which paid off eventually.

Besides the IYF, the most important benefactors during the initial years of the foundation's existence included the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Ford Foundation. Today, the Children of Slovakia Foundation is one of the most successful granting-operating foundations in Slovakia, and its project called the Children's Hour (Hodina deťom) has become an inseparable part of modern philanthropy in Slovakia.

National Endowment for Democracy (NED),
National Democratic Institute (NDI) and
International Republican Institute (IRI)

These three closely cooperating grantmaking and operational organizations have played an important role in the development of pluralistic democracy in Slovakia. Besides financial support and expertise provided to fledgling political institutions, they also helped implement various projects by NGOs, especially those that promote civic participation in the political process on the local or national level. This assistance was most perceptible before the parliamentary elections of 1998 and 2002. From the early stages until today, NED programs have been coordinated from Washington, D.C., by Rodger Potocky, the organization's director for Europe and Eurasia.

- *Carl Gershman, president,
National Endowment for
Democracy.*



- *Kenneth Wollack, president,
National Democratic Institute.*



- *Lorne W. Craner, president, International Republican Institute.*

The NED (President Carl Gershman) receives funds via the U.S. Congress and subsequently distributes them to other subjects, including the NDI (President Kenneth Wollack) and the IRI (President Lorne W. Craner). After the break-up of Czechoslovakia, both the NDI and the IRI opened offices in Bratislava. Since 1994, the IRI Slovakia office has been managed by Jan E. Surotchak and Lindsay Lloyd. In 1999, under Lloyd's leadership, it changed its status to the IRI Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe. Since 2003, the Bratislava office has been managed by Surotchak, and its mandate has been extended to the European level.

An important role in managing NDI activities in Slovakia has been played by Robert Norris, Lisa McLean, Barbara and Paul Miller, and Nicolas Ruszkowski. The NDI office in Slovakia continues to operate today; currently its director is Zuzana Dzúriková-Papazoski, who has a long history of working for the NDI. NDI activities have focused especially on facilitating political transformation. After 2000, the NDI office has focused primarily on assisting the parliaments in Western Balkan countries and improving political skills of young Romani leaders in Slovakia and around the region. Among the beneficiaries of NDI programs is Peter Pollák, a Romani activist who in 2012 became the first Roma to clinch a seat in the Slovak parliament.

The contribution of environmental activists and their organizations to encouraging civic participation in Slovakia deserves special attention. The main reason is that environmental NGOs have not only protected the country's natural heritage but simultaneously encouraged civic activism on the local as well as national level, lobbied lawmakers in order to improve the quality of adopted legislation, and successfully engaged in many battles with the government. This area may also serve as a case study of how financial support, training programs, and strategic counseling provided by American donors – private as well as public – contributed not only to outstanding achievements but especially to building independent and sustainable organizations that continue to operate effectively even today when American donors have moved elsewhere.

The great fortune of Slovakia's third sector was that outstanding environmentalists operated primarily outside the capital Bratislava, which allowed them to be more effective in launching a great number of community projects and initiatives in towns and villages around Slovakia.

As mentioned in the above section on the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe, an innovative grant-giving organization, Environmental Partnership Slovakia, launched its activities in Banská Bystrica in 1993 under the leadership of Juraj Mesík.



- *Ray Murphy, program officer, Atlantic Philanthropies.*

- *Michal Kravčík (right), founder, People and Water and Jerrod Davis, Peace Corps volunteer, Eastern Slovakia, 1996. Photo: author's archive*



Three years later, it changed its name to Ekopolis. In the same town, Juraj Zamkovský established a dynamic and highly professional Center for the Support of Local Activism that soon moved into the nearby village of Ponická Huta. In Eastern Slovakia, environmentalists Michal Kravčík and Juraj Lukáč established the influential civic associations People and Water and the Forest Protection Association VLK, respectively.

The Environmental Training Project led by Boris Strečanský cooperated with all of these NGOs in organizing educational projects aimed at developing the capacities of community non-profit organizations, supporting participative planning processes, and expanding management skills. ETP placed special emphasis on environmental protection and on developing the social, educational and cultural potential of individuals, organizations, and communities with the aim of solving the problems of disadvantaged regions.

- *Krystyna Wolniakowsky, German Marshall Fund of the United States.*



- *A meeting with American donors in Banská Bystrica, 2002.*



Community initiatives

During this period, American governmental institutions as well as NGOs placed particular emphasis on implementing programs aimed at supporting local communities and encouraging citizens to participate in activities on the local level. In addition to the above-mentioned Open Society Fund, the Foundation for a Civil Society (which administered the USAID's Democracy Network program), and SAIA-SCTS, an important role in this area was also played by the following organizations:

- **Healthy Town Banská Bystrica community foundation**

Although this foundation was established already in 1991, it gained true momentum in 1993 when board of directors member Juraj Mesík learned about the concept of community foundations in Michigan and imported it to Banská Bystrica. Thanks to financial support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, a small local foundation led by Beata Hirt became the first community foundation not only in Slovakia but in continental Europe as well. Since then it has inspired emergence of many other community foundations at home as well as abroad. Between 2003 and 2008, Juraj Mesík worked as a community development expert with the World Bank in Washington, D.C.

- **Carpathian Foundation**

This foundation was established in 1994 in Košice based on the initiative of the New York-based EastWest Institute (President John Mroz, Vice-President Stephen Heintz, Program Manager and later Vice-President from Slovakia Vazil Hudák), with financial support from several U.S. foundations, particularly the C.S. Mott Foundation. It is part of the network of national Carpathian foundations from Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania that play an important role in the activities within the Carpathian Euroregion. Managed by Laura Dittel since 1995, the Carpathian Foundation has operated in disadvantaged communities of Eastern Slovakia, supporting various social, educational, cultural, environmental and other activities and cooperating with the state and local administration, NGOs, and the business sphere. The quality of this foundation's work may be documented by the fact that U.S. Steel Košice in 2006 chose it as a key partner.

- **Center for Community Organizing**

A pioneering role in this area was played by Chuck Hirt from the United States who in 1996 launched a new program of commu-



- *Vlasta Körnerová, A Projekt, and Frank Loy, president, German Marshall Fund (behind) and Juraj Mesík, director, EPCE Slovakia, Kvačany, 1994.*

- Vazil Hudák, board member, Carpathian Foundation.
Photo: author's archive

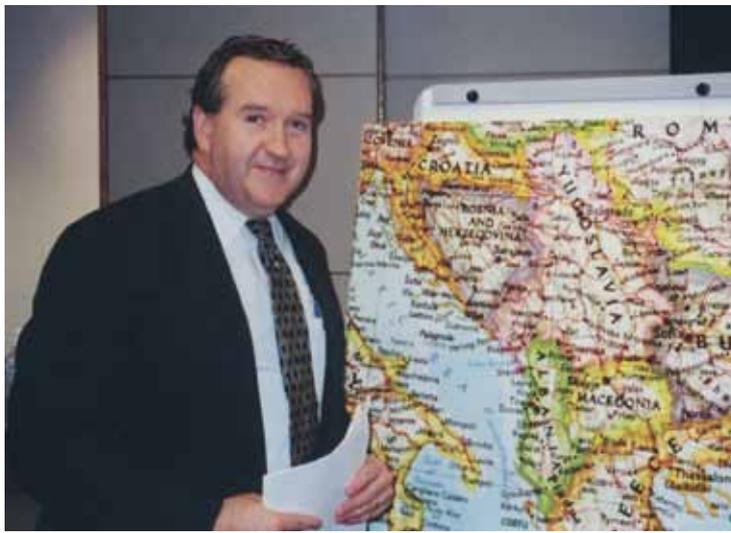


nity organizing that was supported by the National Democratic Institute and USAID. Based in the town of Banská Bystrica, the program brought a number of U.S. lecturers to Slovakia and allowed Slovak activists to gain experience abroad. Thanks to the program, many civic initiatives and NGOs learned to take an active part in decision-making processes.

Eventually, Chuck Hirt found a new home in Banská Bystrica where he established the Center for Community Organizing. He was at the cradle of the Central and East European Citizens Network, which promotes the exchange of experiences among civic initiatives on the local level in 18 countries from Central and Eastern Europe, including the Balkans and the Caucasus.

- Chuck Hirt, director, Center for Community Organizing.





- *John Mroz, president, East West Institute.*

Another important non-profit organization that took roots in Banská Bystrica in 1997 was the Rural Organization for Community Activities (Vidiecka organizácia pre komunitné aktivity – VOKA) whose emergence was inspired by ACDI/VOCA, a U.S. NGO. Its principal mission is to build a strong institutionalized network of individuals, organizations, and communities that cooperate in the field of rural development activities. VOKA also established international cooperation with foreign organizations that specialize in rural development.

Gremium of the Third Sector and Stupava conferences

The Gremium of the Third Sector (G3S) is a reflection of the unique development of civil society in Slovakia and simultaneously a monument to NGO leaders' ability to reach consensus in the name of attaining societal goals. It would be rather difficult to try and find a similar platform of elected representatives of the non-profit sector in other post-communist countries. The first G3S was elected during the second Stupava conference of Slovak NGOs in March 1994; it comprised 16 members who represented four principal fields: humanity and charity; the environment; education, youth and culture; and human rights and minorities. Pavol Demeš served as G3S spokesman from 1994 through 1999, when he was replaced by Helena Woleková.

In the course of its existence, the structure of the G3S and the number of its members has changed. Every year, the G3S in

cooperation with SAIA-SCTS has organized the Stupava conference to discuss important issues concerning the third sector as well as relevant societal issues. The G3S and its members were the main organizers of several large-scale campaigns, including "Third Sector SOS" campaign that protested against the Mečiar government's attempts to control and restrict activities of NGOs, as well as the OK98 Civic Campaign for Fair Elections that played a major role in bringing an end to Mečiarism and restoring democracy in Slovakia.

Most activities pursued by the G3S would have been unthinkable without U.S. foundations' financial support channeled to SAIA-SCTS or the U.S. government's backing via the USAID program. Representatives of the U.S. diplomatic corps in Slovakia regularly attended Stupava conferences, met with G3S leaders around Slovakia, and overtly supported activities of the third sector.

Donors Forum

A special role in developing the third sector, promoting philanthropy, and strengthening democracy in Slovakia was played by a group of foundations that in 1996 agreed to create an informal platform called the Donors Forum. Their principal ambitions included facilitating the exchange of experience, enhancing mutual cooperation, and increasing the overall effectiveness of support provided to the non-hierarchical non-governmental sector. From the outset, the Donors Forum closely cooperated with the G3S. Among the key foundations that stood at the cradle of the Donors Forum were three organizations that were established thanks to American support, namely the Open Society Fund Bratislava (which changed its name to the Open Society Foundation in 1997), the Foundation for a Civil Society (which changed its name to the Pontis Foundation in 1997), and the Children of Slovakia Foundation. Independent granting foundations closely cooperated with governmental programs implemented via foreign embassies accredited in Slovakia. This cooperation was particularly important, especially in organizing and supporting large-scale campaigns that involved a great number of NGOs.

- *Vera Dakova, program officer, C.S. Mott Foundation.*





- *Representatives of the C.S. Mott Foundation: (l.-r.) Jeanette Mansour, Walter Veirs, Shannon Lawder, John Blyth, Lenka Setkova and Clare Brooks, Flint, Michigan, 1999.*

The Donors Forum grew and in 2000 it was registered as a separate organization (Zuzana Fraňová, Katarína Vajdová, Lenka Ilánovská, Eva Riečanská and Lucia Faltinová served as Directors) ; nowadays, it is member of several international organizations. In 2006, it helped establish the Club of Corporate Donors. Every year, the Donors Forum issues a list of Top Corporate Philanthropists, ranking corporate donors according to the volume of funds disbursed.

A special role in the development of the Donors Forum itself as well as in the organizational development of various successful granting foundations (including community ones) was played by the C.S. Mott Foundation, an American foundation whose programs in Slovakia were for the past two decades coordinated by John Blyth, Clare Brooks, Tamas Scsaurszki and Vera Dakova.

Think tanks

This period marked the emergence of a rather small but influential group of American-style NGOs called think tanks, which were established by renowned Slovak experts from sociology, political science, economics, and other fields. Specializing in



- *Douglas Rutzen, president, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law.*

independent research and analysis, these organizations began to contribute to the public debate on reforms. Moreover, in cooperation with other NGOs they created a critical platform with regard to the Mečiar administration, which strove to silence critics who operated in the government-controlled academic sphere. Analysts from Slovak think tanks issued numerous publications, organized seminars and conferences, and managed to make their voice heard in the media by commenting on ongoing events and developments and proposing alternative solutions to public policies.

Think tanks specializing in economic issues included the F. A. Hayek Foundation and the Center for Economic and Social Analyses (known also as M.E.S.A. 10). The leading think tank in the field of social policy was the Center for the Analysis of Social Policy (S.P.A.C.E.), which was established in 1993 by sociologist Iveta Radičová. Thanks to Helena Woleková, S.P.A.C.E. also focused on researching and promoting the third sector; in 1996 it took part in an international comparative survey of the non-profit sector that was coordinated by the Institute for Political Studies at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In the field of foreign policy, the dominant think tank was the Slovak Foreign Policy Association that was established in 1993 by Magda Vášáryová.

One year before the key parliamentary elections of 1998, a group of experts from various fields led by Martin Bútora and Grigorij Mesežnikov founded the Institute for Public Affairs (Inštitút pre

verejné otázky – IVO), which gradually evolved into the most agile and prolific think tank specializing in public policies in Slovakia. IVO researchers and analysts also actively participated in the OK98 Civic Campaign. During initial years, editors Thomas W. Skladony and Sharon Fisher of Washington, D.C., were instrumental in IVO publishing activities.

In many respects, the above-mentioned think tanks were inspired by the American tradition; they tended to establish cooperation with numerous U.S. experts, and their activities were often financially supported from U.S. sources.



- *Activists of the Third Sector SOS campaign (l.-r.) Stela Hanzelová, Maroš Silný, Ľubica Trubíniová and Helena Woleková, 1996.*

"Third Sector SOS" campaign

The Mečiar administration gradually tried to get under control all critics of its authoritarian style of governance. In doing so, the government could hardly avoid NGOs whose representatives often criticized it for abusing power and deviating from democratic principles. In an attempt to restrict the freedom of the third sector, particularly foundations, the administration began to draft a restrictive amendment to the Foundation Act in 1996. That legislation mobilized civil society organizations and sparked the unprecedented "Third Sector SOS" campaign, which manifested the vitality and operability of non-profit organizations. NGOs

entered into a series of negotiations with the government during which they managed to alleviate the proposed bill's restrictive tone, while also learning to reach collective consensus and communicate with the general public. At the same time, Slovakia's third sector won respect abroad for showing the world a different face of the country than that demonstrated by the government.

An important role during the SOS campaign was played by the U.S.-based International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). Its specialists visited Slovakia in order to elaborate expert opinions. The unusual campaign soon began to be discussed at international forums; CIVICUS, an organization based in Washington, D.C., analyzed it in a case study that formed part of a series examining global examples of civic initiatives.

- *During the Third Sector SOS campaign, 1996.*
Photo: author's archive



The visit of Hillary Clinton and the roundtable with NGOs

In 1996, amid contention between Slovak NGOs and the internationally-criticized and increasingly isolated Mečiar administration, First Lady of the United States Hillary Clinton paid an official visit to Slovakia along with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright, who was named secretary of state a year later. Besides meeting with government officials, Clinton also attended a widely-publicized Roundtable with Slovak NGOs in Bratislava to discuss the role of civil society, human rights, and democracy. This gesture significantly raised the self-confidence and prestige of the country's third sector in and inspired Hillary Clinton's continued interest in Slovakia and its civil society in subsequent years. In 1997, Clinton personally addressed an encouraging letter to participants at the fifth Stupava conference in Košice.



- Meeting of First Lady Hillary Clinton with representatives of Slovak NGOs in Bratislava, October 1999.
Photo: The White House

OK98 Civic Campaign

This non-partisan campaign conceived and organized by representatives of the G3S and other NGO leaders who closely cooperated with the Donors Forum was an unprecedented collective endeavor by dozens of Slovak NGOs that engaged in an environment that had previously been unknown to most of them: the political arena. Well-known human rights activist Šarlota Pufflerová (her NGO, Citizen and Democracy, cooperated with the Pew Charitable Trust in past) served as spokesperson. The campaign's main ambition was to mobilize and educate voters as well as to monitor the electoral process before the September 1998 parliamentary elections. The campaign not only had a decisive impact on what was later dubbed as "the second Velvet Revolution in Slovakia" by helping to topple Mečiar's neo-authoritarian regime, but it also affected the future character of citizens' participation in the administration of public affairs. The campaign gave birth to a number of personalities and organizations with ambitions and skills in the field of civic advocacy. From this point onward, activities of the third sector in the political process became an integral part of Slovakia's political culture.

Until the present day, the OK98 Civic Campaign and its activists continue to be a source of inspiration in countries with authoritarian regimes or tendencies. Of all the activities pursued by Slovak NGOs, the OK98 campaign has attracted the most attention by far and has been discussed in articles, papers, and analyses written in Slovakia as well as abroad. The international public had a chance to read about the OK98 Civic Campaign and its inspiring impact in *Reclaiming Democracy*, a book edited by Joerg Forbrig and Pavol Demeš that explored civic campaigns in Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine. Authored by a team of international specialists (the chapter on the OK98 campaign in Slovakia was written by Martin Bútor), the publication was translated from English to Azeri and Arabic and soon will appear also in Albanian; the English version is available on the Internet.

The OK98 Civic Campaign was conceived and organized by civic leaders who hailed from different fields of expertise. The key was that participating NGOs could rely not only on European support but also on financial, professional and diplomatic assistance provided by independent U.S. foundations and governmental institutions. The former included most notably the Open Society Fund, the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the German Marshall Fund, and the National Endowment for Democracy; the latter were represented mainly by USAID.

- *Representatives of the OK98 campaign Šarlota Pufflerová, Pavol Demeš and Juraj Mesík at the Democratic Round Table, 1998.*
Photo: author's archive



- *Marek Kapusta, coordinator of the Rock the Vote campaign, 1998.*





- *Election monitors from the Civic Eye, 1998. Photo: author's archive*



- *Activists of the OK98 campaign distributing election materials, 1998.*

Thanks to support from NDI, several completely new NGOs emerged in Slovakia, including Občianske oko (Civic Eye) and MEMO98. Both of these groups have gradually evolved into internationally-recognized organizations that have monitored elections in various parts of the world. Rock the Vote, the successful U.S. campaign aimed at mobilizing young voters, was brought to Slovakia by Peace Corps volunteer Mike Hochleutner and administered by the Foundation for a Civil Society. That campaign was also re-applied abroad with certain modifications. As the battle for democracy was entering the final stages, Slovakia's third sector got a big jolt of encouragement in the form of a prestigious international award bestowed to several local NGOs. In May 1998, U.S. President Bill Clinton, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and European Commission President Jacques



- *Ambassador Ralph Johnson signs the Key to Democracy, presented by Jaroslav Tešliar of People and Water NGO, Bratislava 1998.
Photo: author's archive*

Santer granted Democracy and Civil Society Awards to 50 organizations and individuals from 29 Central and East European countries as "an acknowledgement of the courage and engagement in furthering the fundamental principles of democracy and civil society". In Slovakia, the award was bestowed to the Gremium of the Third Sector, the People and Water civic association, and the Jekhatane/Spolu and Inforoma foundations. The gala presentation of the award to Slovak laureates took place on 19 May 1998 in Bratislava's Pálffy's Palace, and attendees at the event included U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Ralph Johnson, British Ambassador to Slovakia Peter Harborne and Chargé d'Affaires of the European Commission Delegation in Slovakia Christian Bourgin. A year later in California, People and Water director Michal Kravčík received a prestigious Goldman Award for the best environmental project in Europe.

_ BASIC HALLMARKS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (1993–1998)

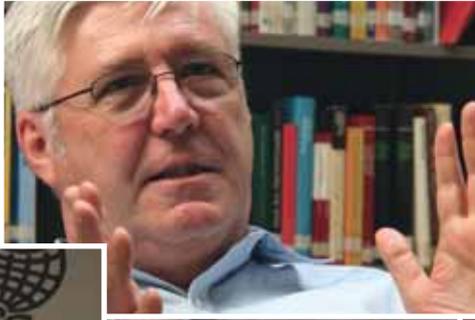
The first years of Slovakia's independence were dominated by the risk of authoritarianism and may be described as the most important era of U.S. assistance in Slovakia in terms of variety, scope and impact. Private donors as well as programs financed by the U.S. government significantly helped in professionalizing the country's third sector, establishing organizations and alliances that laid the foundation for the future development of civil society in Slovakia, strengthening civic participation on the national as well as the local level, and teaching citizens to take part in decision-making processes.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of this period relates to the perception of U.S. governmental and non-governmental assistance provided to Slovakia. While pro-democratic segments of society appreciated it thoroughly and openly, the ruling political elite along with the segments of society it controlled adopted a critical and even hostile attitude to it. It was truly difficult to operate in a country whose top officials declared respect for basic rules of democratic governance on the one hand but coarsely violated them on the other. The United States' assistance provided to NGOs, particularly those that were critical of undemocratic practices, was often viewed by Mečiar allies as unacceptable meddling in the internal affairs of the young state. As a result, not only American foundations but also U.S. diplomats who were posted in Slovakia during this period (including Consul General Paul Hacker, Ambassadors Theodore Russell and Ralph Johnson, and USAID directors Patricia Lerner and Paula Goddard) were forced to work in a rather non-standard environment. Hillary Clinton also had a chance to see Slovakia's dual face: when after a rather cold reception at the Slovak Government's Office, she had a cordial and pleasant meeting with civil society representatives that she continues to remember until the present day and even mentioned in her autobiography.

U.S. assistance to Slovakia's civil society actors, who struggled against Mečiar's authoritarian regime and helped defeat it in the democratic elections of 1998, may be described as an indisputable and invaluable contribution of the overseas superpower to Slovakia's modernization and inclusion in the community of Western democracies.

• Overcoming arrears and joining the EU and NATO

(1998-2006)



The end of the era of Mečiarism released within Slovak society a desire to establish a new style of governance and resume the process of complying with accession criteria set by European and transatlantic structures. The new coalition government that comprised five political parties embarked on a path of implementing radical economic and social reforms and accelerating integration efforts with respect to the EU and NATO. Representatives of the world's democratic community, including the United States, looked on with sympathies as Slovakia extricated itself from undemocratic practices and introduced a new social and political order.

The new Mikuláš Dzurinda administration included people who were intimately familiar with the third sector. Leading think tanks manifested their preparedness to cooperate with the government on inevitable reforms. Prominent NGO representative Martin Bútorá was appointed as Slovak ambassador to the United States. Assisted by his wife Zora Bútorová and a dynamic staff, Bútorá contributed to a qualitative turnaround in bilateral U.S.-Slovak relations, and the Slovak Embassy in Washington, D.C. became an effective promoter and supporter of Slovak NGOs on American soil.

After 1998, Slovakia became an example and inspiration for pro-democratic forces in some post-communist countries of the Balkans and the former Soviet Union that were also ruled by leaders with authoritarian tendencies. It was in this period that Slovakia was increasingly urged to share its specific reform experience with other countries.

The rule of the ideologically-diverse coalition government, whose principal source of cohesion was opposition to Mečiar, was not free of problems. The radical reforms inevitably contributed to the population's deteriorating socio-economic status and encouraged discontent. It became increasingly complicated to convey to the population the message that it was necessary to "tighten their belts" on the way to prosperity. These difficulties increased Mečiar's chances to return to power. Before the parliamentary elections of 2002, EU and U.S. representatives

issued a series of unusually frank statements in which they warned that Mečiar's return could thwart Slovakia's promising integration prospects. The country's civil society was mobilized again, and Slovak NGOs launched a great number of informational-educational projects in which they explained to citizens that the upcoming elections were yet another crossroads that would either lead Slovakia into prosperous Europe or throw it backward to the times of deficient democracy and complicated international status.

In the 2002 parliamentary elections, Slovak voters re-elected the political forces that had initiated the reforms and gave them a unique chance to complete them in order to lock the country safely within Western structures. Eventually, the second Mikuláš Dzurinda administration fulfilled its historic mission of leading Slovakia along the bumpy road all the way to NATO and the EU. The only country to have been suspended from the process of EU accession talks on account of democratic deficit, Slovakia came back strong and made its way into the first batch of post-communist countries that joined the EU in May 2004.

Unfortunately, the second Mikuláš Dzurinda administration was unable to avoid internal disputes, quarrels, and even corruption scandals. Also, it underrated the importance of communication with the general public and thus facilitated the rise of a new political force, namely the center-left Smer (Direction) led by the increasingly popular Róbert Fico, who self-confidently distinguished himself from the ruling coalition as well as the other opposition parties. The parliamentary elections of 2006 brought a resounding victory for Smer-Social Democracy (Smer-SD) and put Fico in charge of forming the new coalition government.

United States acknowledges OK98 Civic Campaign

After the democratic turnaround in fall 1998, the successful OK98 Civic Campaign became a true international hit. After long years of negative and critical news reports on Slovakia, the campaign began to improve the country's image and set the course that was sustained by the new democratically-oriented government. Slovak civil society proved to be sufficiently developed and prepared to assist in the implementation of necessary democratic reforms and integration of the young country into European and transatlantic groupings.

During a conference dedicated to the decade of post-communist transformation organized by USAID on 5 October 1999 in Warsaw, the OK98 Civic Campaign received the USAID Good Governance and Civil Society Award for the best cooperative NGO project in Central and Eastern Europe. The ceremony was attended by Juraj Mesík, Péter Hunčík (of the Sándor Márai Foundation), and Pavol Demeš. The award was bestowed by Hillary Clinton, who traveled to Bratislava afterward to meet also with OK98 activists. The context and atmosphere of this meeting were totally unlike to Clinton's visit to Mečiar-ruled Slovakia in 1996.

Growing interest in the experience and expertise of Slovak NGOs

Slovak civil society representatives began to share their recent unique experience with representatives of the international community. Many activists from Central and East European countries as well as representatives of donor circles expressed interest in the OK98 Civic Campaign. In March 1999, the Freedom House led by James Denton and SAIA-SCTS jointly organized a seminar in Bratislava at which the main protagonists of the OK98 campaign shared their know-how with 35 participants from Ukraine, Croatia, Serbia, Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Lithuania who were particularly interested in the

principles of non-partisan election campaigning, coordination of donors, mobilization of young voters, and civic monitoring. The event gave birth to a number of partnerships between Slovak and foreign activists that gradually developed into long-term practical cooperation across the entire post-communist region.

During his official visit to Bratislava in February 2000 U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering took part in a roundtable with representatives of Slovakia's third sector and discussed possible ways of helping Western Balkan countries, particularly Serbia. A number of Slovak activists such as Rastislav Kužel (MEMO98), Peter Novotný (Civic Eye) and Marek Kapusta (Pontis Foundation) have become respected specialists who trained activists in other countries.

From Democratic Network to Your Land

After Mečiar was forced to leave the post of prime minister, Slovakia gradually worked its way into the top category of reform countries, a development that negatively affected the scope and character of U.S. assistance. USAID, the main agency that channeled the U.S. government's development aid to Slovakia, gradually scaled down its activity. In 2002, after a decade of providing invaluable service, USAID officially terminated all of its programs (that was two years after the originally-announced closure date). The impressive results of USAID assistance in Slovakia were later evaluated in a publication by Robert J. Maushammer (available at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACI590.pdf).

- *Slovak NGO leaders active abroad: (l.-r.) Marek Kapusta and Balazs Jarábik (Pontis Foundation), Rastislav Kužel (MEMO98), Marián Gabriel (Civic Eye) and Marek Mračka (MEMO98), Bratislava 2000.*





- *Patricia Lerner, former country director of USAID Slovakia, 1993-1997.*

An important segment of USAID activities in Slovakia related to financial assistance to NGOs, which was provided in 1997-2002 via two principal grant programs, namely Democracy Network (DemNet, 1997-1998) and Your Land (1999-2002). After initially disbursing funds directly to Slovak NGOs, USAID soon decided to support them via Slovak foundations that had the necessary know-how and experience with grant provision. The decision represented a true breakthrough in the context of providing U.S. development aid to Slovakia as it was a display of trust in the institutional capacities of Slovakia's non-profit sector.

The DemNet program was administered in Slovakia by the Foundation for a Civil Society. Managed by Jan E. Surotchak, the program distributed funds worth \$3.3 million; focusing primarily on civic advocacy and public policy. The public tender to administer Your Land, USAID's final program in Slovakia, was won by two experienced foundations, namely Ekopolis based in Banská Bystrica and ETP Slovensko based in Bratislava and Košice. Disbursing

- *Zuzana Szatmáry, director, Charter 97 Foundation, Bratislava with Andrej Sannikov of Belarus, cofounder of the Charter 97 human rights organisation, Bratislava 2004.*





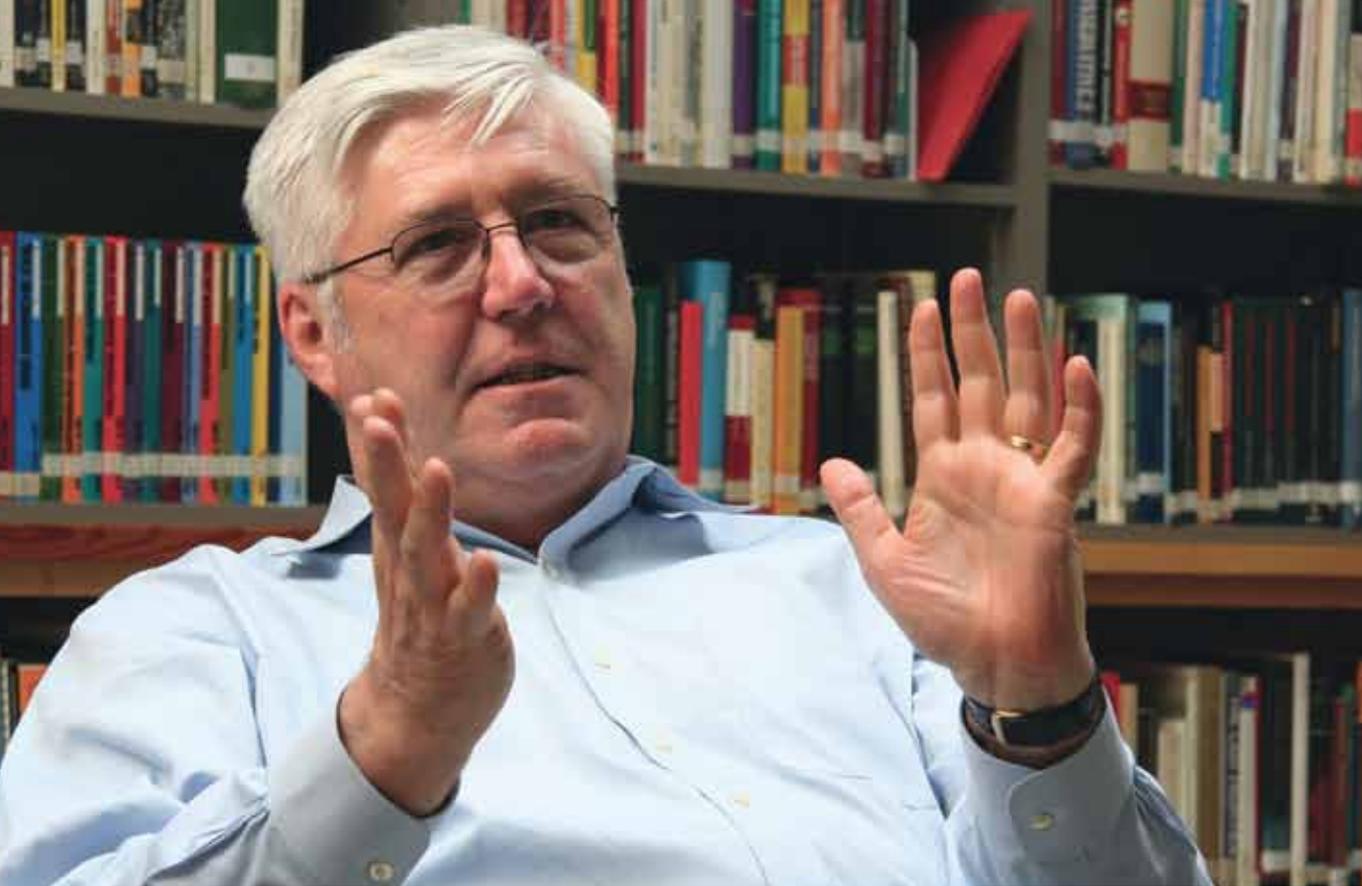
- *Jan E. Surotchak, Foundation for a Civil Society/Nadácia Pontis, Bratislava 2000.*
Photo: author's archive

funds in the total amount of \$2 million, the program was aimed at strengthening citizens' participation in the administration of public affairs. Your Land supported initiatives in the field of civic advocacy, combating corruption, rural development, community foundations, and the promotion of women's and minority rights.

In the course of their existence, both grant programs supported a great number of high-quality NGO projects and thus facilitated Slovakia's transition to a standard democratic system and its compliance with EU and NATO integration criteria.

Opening the German Marshall Fund Office for Central and Eastern Europe in Bratislava

In the late 1990s the German Marshall Fund (GMF), a leading U.S. NGO based in Washington, D.C., decided to open a permanent mission in Bratislava as a result of intensifying activities in the region. This author won an international contest for the post of director of the GMF Office for Central and Eastern Europe. (Marianne Ginsburg, Debbie Harding, Krystyna Wolniakowski, Steve Grand, Phil Henderson and others coordinated various CEE programs in previous decade). The regional office was opened in January 2000, with GMF President Craig Kennedy attending the ceremony.



- *Craig Kennedy, president, German Marshall Fund of the United States.*

The GMF regional office in Bratislava implemented programs aimed at providing financial and organizational support to reforms, preparing countries from the region for EU and NATO accession, developing leadership capacities, and intensifying cooperation with the United States. Besides extending grants to NGOs, organizing conferences and seminars and publishing specialized analyses and public opinion surveys (Transatlantic Trends), the GMF also organized the Marshall Memorial Fellowship (MMF), a program of learning trips to the United States for young professionals from various fields of expertise. Sandy Phinney and Joerg Forbrig served as Program officers in GMF Bratislava office.

Like other donors operating in the region, the GMF terminated all programs aimed at financing NGOs in the Visegrad Four countries shortly after their accession to the EU, although it continued to finance the Transatlantic Trends project and the MMF program. Instead, the GMF increased its involvement in the Balkans and in post-Soviet countries. In 2010, the GMF closed down its regional office in Bratislava since it opened regional branches in Belgrade, Bucharest and Warsaw. At that time, author became a Senior Transatlantic Fellow at GMF.

During the decade of its existence, the GMF Bratislava office established close cooperation with partners across the region to implement democratization projects in the Balkans (especially in Serbia) and countries of the former Soviet Union (particularly Ukraine and Belarus).

Culture connects in good times as well as bad

A true breakthrough in Slovakia's image in the United States was achieved during the Month of Slovak Culture, a festival conceived and organized by the Association for Culture, Education and Communication, a Bratislava-based NGO led by Ľubomíra Slušná. Taking place in February 2001 in New York City, the impressive series of cultural events featuring Slovak fine arts, music, dancing, theater, and film entertained New Yorkers for the full 28 days of February. The festival took place at some of the most prestigious arenas of New York, including the American Craft Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Lincoln Center, the World Financial Center and the La MaMa Theater. The Conference on Investment in the Visegrad Four Countries also constituted part of the program, taking place under the patronage of Slovak Deputy Prime Minister for the Economy Ivan Mikloš.

The festival would have been unthinkable without the firm commitment of partners from Slovakia as well as the United States. Along with his wife, U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Carl Spielvogel – a native New Yorker – was particularly helpful in organizing the event. The festival's general partner was an American corporation that had invested heavily in Slovakia just a year earlier: U.S. Steel Košice.

- *Ľubomíra Slušná, president, Association for Culture, Education and Communication (left) with former U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Carl Spielvogel and his wife Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel, Bratislava, 2010.*





- *In front of the U.S. capitol, Ambassador Martin Bútora and Pavol Demeš hand over to Senator Hillary Clinton publication "We're All in the Same Boat." October 2001. Photo: author's archive*

On 11 September 2001, half a year after the Month of Slovak Culture, terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center in New York. That act of barbarism provoked a wave of solidarity around the world, including Slovakia. Assisted by a large network of volunteers, the Association for Culture, Education and Communication responded on 28–30 September with „Sme na jednej lodi“ (We're All in the Same Boat), a happening that took place simultaneously in 35 towns around Slovakia. The passers-by could express their solidarity with thousands of New York victims by making small paper boats that were subsequently thrown into a big boat of solidarity that was placed on the main square. Citizens' involvement exceeded all expectations as nearly 100,000 people took part in the event. The message of solidarity from Slovak citizens in the form of a symbol made out of small boats was eventually delivered to New York Governor George E. Pataki and New York Senator Hillary Clinton.

Development of corporate philanthropy

The phenomenon of corporate philanthropy in Slovakia began to see some systematic development at the turn of the new millennium. Apart from the Donors Forum and the American Chamber of Commerce in the Slovak Republic, AmCham (Executive Director Jake Slegers), an important role in cultivating the concept in Slovakia was played most notably by two domestic foundations, namely the Foundation for a Civil Society (later called the Pontis Foundation) and the Center for Philanthropy, a non-profit organization that in 2002 split from the ETP Slovakia foundation.

Under the leadership of Robert Vlašič and Lenka Surotchak (since 2002), the Pontis Foundation in cooperation with the Foundation for a Civil Society New York and City Group Foundation introduced in 1998 Via Bona Slovakia, which are annual

awards bestowed in public acknowledgement of companies and entrepreneurs who contribute to cultivating corporate philanthropy and responsible enterprise in Slovakia. The awards have become rather popular, and the annual awards ceremony always attracts significant media attention.

In 2004, the Pontis Foundation established the Business Leaders Forum, an informal association of companies that are committed to promoting corporate social responsibility in Slovakia. The Pontis Foundation has also been organizing training programs and events for corporations that are interested in the concept of corporate philanthropy and volunteerism.

Under the leadership of Boris Strečanský, the Center for Philanthropy launched its first grant program financed by a large corporation in 1999. Sponsored by the Globtel telecommunications operator (which has since changed its name to Orange), the maiden program was aimed at regional development. Since then, the Center for Philanthropy has extended its activities aimed at establishing corporate philanthropy programs to include the Slovak Gas Industry Foundation (Nadácia SPP), the Tatra banka Foundation, and other large corporate philanthropic programs.

Numerous Slovak entrepreneurs are members of local Rotary or Lions Clubs. There are several dozens of them throughout the country. These international networks, which originated in the United States, are focusing on fundraising for charitable causes, cooperation with other NGOs, and international youth exchange programs in addition to their club activities.

U.S. Steel Košice Foundation

Among the pioneers of corporate philanthropy in Slovakia is U.S. Steel Košice, a daughter company of the United States Steel Corporation. In 2000, the American steel giant acquired Východoslovenské železiarne Košice, the country's largest steel mill, which struggled with serious financial problems. Since then, it has gradually developed the firm into a successful business venture. From the beginning, U.S. Steel Košice supported publicly-beneficial projects, particularly in Eastern Slovakia. Since 2002, a significant part of the firm's philanthropic activities takes place via the U.S. Steel Košice Foundation, whose emergence was initiated by the company's first president John H. Goodish.

In little over a decade of its existence, U.S. Steel Košice proved it is not only a reliable business partner but also a responsible donor. U.S. Steel Košice Foundation primarily supports projects focusing on health care, youth education, physical education and sports, senior citizens, as well as other social, humanitarian and charitable projects. A scholarship program sponsored by U.S. Steel Košice Foundation supports the university studies of talented students from children's homes and socially-disadvantaged families in the Košice and Prešov regions.

Supporting NGO activities before the 2002 parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections in September 2002 were of crucial importance to Slovakia and its integration ambitions. The prospects of Mečiar resuming power and thwarting the country's chances to join the EU mobilized Slovak NGOs once again. In the meantime, the third sector went through ideological as well as organizational differentiation, which reduced the influence and operability of the Gremium of the Third Sector. Unlike the relatively homogeneous OK98 Civic Campaign four years before, Slovak NGOs conceived a series of 88 separate election projects this time. They were aimed primarily at mobilizing and educating voters who had grown disenchanted and apathetic because of policies pursued by the first Dzurinda administration.

The election projects of Slovak NGOs were financially supported by a relatively large and diverse group of European and U.S. donors that was dominated by Western countries' embassies and independent U.S. foundations. In terms of the volume of disbursed funds, American assistance once again prevailed, largely on the back of grants extended by Freedom House, the Open Society Foundation, the German Marshall Fund, the Your Land program financed by USAID and administered by a consortium of ETP Slovensko and Ekopolis foundations, and the Democracy Commission Grants program administered by the U.S. Embassy in Slovakia.

Like four years earlier, the involvement of Slovak NGOs deserves strong credit for the election outcome and, consequently, the continuation of a pro-European government.



- *The civic campaign for Slovakia's entry to NATO and EU, 2004. Photo: author's archive*

- *Ambassador Ronald Weiser (left) and Ambassador Erik van der Linden, head of the European Commission delegation in Slovakia at the 9th Stupava conference of Slovak NGOs, Košice, 2002.*



Supporting Slovakia's accession to Euro-Atlantic integration groupings

The U.S.-Slovakia Action Commission (later called the U.S.-EU-Slovakia Action Commission) was jointly established in spring 2000 by the Washington-based think tank, the **Center for Strategic and International Studies**, together with its partner organization in Slovakia, the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. Comprising representatives of governmental, business and expert circles, the subject created an important platform to discuss problems of Slovakia's compliance with NATO accession criteria.



A specific role in the process of NATO enlargement was played by the **U.S. Committee on NATO**, an American organization chaired by Bruce Jackson throughout its existence (1995–2002). After Mečiar's election defeat, this interest group was instrumental in paving a relatively smooth path for Slovakia into expert and political circles in Washington, D.C. The group included Republicans as well as Democrats whose lobbying eventually contributed to the smooth ratification of Slovakia's application to join NATO by the U.S. Senate.

Originally founded as part of the American Enterprise Institute, the **New Atlantic Initiative** (NAI) was yet another American NGO that focused on helping Slovakia materialize its integration ambitions. NAI Director Jeffrey Gedmin in cooperation with the GMF Bratislava, the Institute for Public Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized an international conference on 28-30 April 2000 in Bratislava entitled "The Future of Euro-Atlantic Integration: Chances and Obstacles" that was attended by a great number of security experts and political leaders from Europe and overseas.

In 2001, the first U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Theodore Russell along with a group of concerned friends founded the Friends of Slovakia volunteer organization in Washington, D.C. Amb. Russell continues to serve as honorary chair of the organization until the present day. In close cooperation with Slovakia's Embassy in Washington, D.C. as well as compatriot organizations, the **Friends of Slovakia** intensely lobbied in favor of Slovakia's accession to NATO and the EU. Under the leadership of its Vice Chairman and President William Tucker, FOS organized several important VIP gala dinners in both Washington DC and Bratislava to raise funds for FOS initiatives, including its Slovak Scholars program, which is coordinated by Professor Sharon Wolchik and Dr. Sharon Fisher.

On the other side of the ocean, a great feat in public diplomacy was accomplished by U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Ronald Weiser, who systematically traveled across Slovakia and explained the significance of NATO and EU membership for the country's future. During his mission, the U.S. Embassy cooperated with a number of Slovak NGOs, including the Euro-Atlantic Center (EAC), which had recently been established by concerned students at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (the first EAC director was Mário Nicolini).

- *Bruce Jackson, former president, U.S. Committee on NATO.*

Historic visit of the U.S. president to Slovakia

A confirmation of special Slovak-American relations was the first (and the last so far) visit of an acting U.S. president to Slovakia. In February 2005, U.S. President George W. Bush visited Bratislava to meet with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin while also holding a series of bilateral Slovak-American meetings. Accompanied by his wife Laura and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, President Bush also met with so-called champions of freedom during his visit. President Bush invited to Bratislava a group of personalities from Central and East European countries to express his appreciation for their personal contribution to freedom and democracy. Slovakia was represented by Alexander Bachnár, an 86-year old member of a Jewish guerrilla unit in the Slovak National Uprising of 1944, as well as two civil society leaders, Martin Bútora and the author.

- *President George W. Bush meets the Champions of Freedom from Central and Eastern Europe in the building of the Slovak National Theatre during his official visit to Slovakia. February 2005. Photo: The White House*



BASIC HALLMARKS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (1998–2006)

Between 1998 and 2006, Slovakia accelerated its reform endeavors, finished building democratic institutions, and complied with the criteria to join the OECD, the EU, and NATO. After years of stagnation, official Slovak-U.S. relations achieved unusual dynamism and quality. Last but not least, Slovakia improved its status from a net recipient of development aid to a country that financed its own programs of development aid abroad.

At this stage, U.S. assistance provided to Slovakia's civil society entered a different qualitative level. On the one hand, U.S. subjects maintained assistance to activities aimed at preventing a relapse of undemocratic practices and strengthened programs of educating citizens in the field of participating in decision-making processes and monitoring the performance of public officials. On the other hand, U.S. donors paid special attention to the development of domestic giving, including community and corporate philanthropy, with the aim of gradually eliminating the country's dependence on U.S. funds.

- *Larry Silverman, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Bratislava and Olga Gyárfášová, sociologist, IVO after presenting Transatlantic Trends. Bratislava, 2007.*





- *Deborah Harding (left), vice president, Open Society Institute, Katarína Vajdová, director, Civil Society Development Foundation, Banská Bystrica, 2002.*

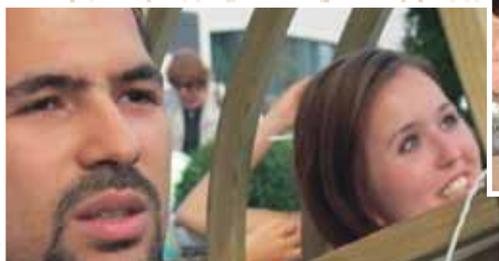
In cooperation with government institutions, diplomats and business subjects, Slovak NGOs systematically began to present the "new" Slovakia in the United States, portraying it as a country that had set out to overcome the era of partial international isolation due to undemocratic practices of the Mečiar administration. Shortly before Slovakia's accession to NATO and the EU in 2004, a number of U.S. think tanks teamed up with their Slovak partners in order to strengthen the Slovak government's reform capacity and ensure the proper level of citizens' awareness.

A special chapter during this period relates to Slovakia's fledgling development aid, which the United States not only observed with sympathies but was also prepared to support. After years of tense relations between the Slovak government and the third sector, development aid became the case example of cooperation between Slovak NGOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the challenging environment of the Western Balkans and countries of the former Soviet Union. U.S. NGOs and diplomats began to seek Slovak experts in order to use Slovakia's specific reform experience in their own democratization projects implemented in third countries.

The horrible terrorist assaults on targets in New York and Washington provoked a fundamental change in U.S. foreign policy and the entire system of international relations. Slovakia became a reliable ally of the United States in combating international terrorism; following the controversial invasion of Iraq in 2003, though, criticism of U.S. foreign policy increased in Slovakia.

- **Róbert Fico teams up with Vladimír Mečiar and Ján Slota**

(2006 – 2010)



While Róbert Fico claimed a resounding victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections, he needed coalition partners in order to form a majority government. Eventually, he teamed up with two parties of nationalistic and populist background: Ján Slota's SNS and Mečiar's fading HZDS. The international democratic community observed the forming of this administration with anxiety, especially due to the involvement of infamous personas such as SNS Chairman Slota with his anti-Hungarian rhetoric, as well as Mečiar. Róbert Fico, for his part, had made several anti-American statements in the past.

The fears that Slovakia would deviate from its pro-European and pro-Atlantic course eventually proved false. Although the new administration's mutual relations with the United States and partners within the EU grew colder, Slovakia continued to fulfill its obligations as a member of NATO and the EU. During Fico's rule, Slovakia joined the Schengen Area and Washington abolished visa regime, which was of great psychological significance for people traveling to the United States. Last but not least, Slovakia became the second post-communist country after Slovenia to comply with the economic criteria for the adoption of the common European currency, and it joined the eurozone on 1 January 2009.

During Fico's rule, a serious financial crisis broke out in the United States, which naturally had disastrous effects on the global economy and, consequently, on the European and Slovak economies as well. To make matters worse, Slovakia also had to endure a serious shortage of gas in January 2009 that ensued from disputes between Russia and Ukraine.

Compared to the previous period, the Róbert Fico administration accentuated a stronger role of the state. Naturally, the government's cooperation with civil society organizations weakened during this period. To Mečiar's HZDS and Slota's SNS, the third sector's presence was a traumatizing reminder of previous civic campaigns and the alleged "meddling in Slovakia's internal affairs" by foreign actors. There were even attempts to pass legislative amendments that would jeopardize the financing of non-profit organizations. The NGO community joined forces once again to

launch another nationwide campaign called "People to People" in order to stave off the government's efforts to abolish the mechanism that allowed people to assign 2 percent of their income tax to non-profit subjects of their choice.

The dominant ruling Smer-SD party managed to hold the three-member coalition together until the end of the prescribed four-year tenure, although its term in office was marked with clientelism and corruption. The concentrated pressure mounted by the opposition, the media, and NGOs forced Prime Minister Fico to remove 12 ministers who faced suspicions of corruption and clientelism. This electoral term also sealed the political fate of Mečiar and his party, which was eliminated from parliament in the June 2010 election after two decades of dominating Slovak politics, while the SNS sneaked into parliament by the narrowest of margins. On the other hand, Smer-SD manifested its strength and won the 2010 elections with 34 percent of the popular vote, but even this result was not enough to form a new government. Fico was forced to return the president's authorization to establish a government, and four center-right opposition parties soon reached consensus on program priorities and formed a new administration led by Iveta Radičová.

EXAMPLES OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (2006–2010)

Slovak Atlantic Commission

During this period, a strong impulse for the development of transatlantic relations was brought by the Slovak Atlantic Commission (SAC), an NGO led by young leader Róbert Vass who had previously chaired the Euro-Atlantic Center. In a strategically far-sighted decision, the SAC offered Rastislav Káčer chairmanship of its board of trustees immediately after he had finished his mission as Slovakia's Ambassador to the United States in 2008. Assisted by a team of ambitious students and young professionals, the tandem of Káčer-Vass gradually created a new type of organization that effectively mobilized Slovakia's community of foreign policy and security analysts and established intense cooperation with a broad network of U.S. governmental

and non-governmental actors. The SAC represents Slovakia in the Atlantic Treaty Association (ATA) that associates Atlantic commissions from more than 40 countries. Nowadays, its team of international advisors features several prominent American security analysts such as Ian Brzezinski, Stephen Flanagan, Andrew Michta, Wess Mitchell, and Damon Wilson.

The flagship of the SAC is GLOBSEC, an annual international conference dedicated to security issues. In terms of scope and quality, this event has grown beyond Slovakia's borders and is gradually becoming one of the most prestigious events of its kind in the entire Euro-Atlantic space.



- *Robert Vass (right), secretary general, Slovak Atlantic Commission and Wess Mitchell, president, Center for European Policy Analysis at GLOBSEC Conference, Bratislava, 2012.*

Center for North American Studies

In May 2008, the Center for North American Studies emerged at the University of Economics in Bratislava, mostly thanks to Michal Kovács, another young leader who had gained organizational skills while working with the Euro-Atlantic Center. An important role in establishing this educational institution was played by Martin Bútorá, Slovakia's former Ambassador to the United States who became its academic guarantor. Currently, the Center offers a one-of-a-kind training program in Slovakia where participants learn about political, economic, cultural, and civil society aspects of life in the United States and Canada. The language of instruction is English, and most lecturers are



- *Michal Kovács, director, Center for North American Studies, University of Economics in Bratislava.*

- *Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák meets former Ambassadors of the United States to Slovakia at the Heritage Foundation in Washington. November, 2009. From left, Ralph Johnson, Rodolphe Vallee, Miroslav Lajčák, Vincent Obsitnik and Theodore Russell.*

respected domestic and foreign experts and pedagogues. The program interconnects top managers and entrepreneurs with analysts from academic and non-governmental sectors.

From the beginning, the Center established close cooperation with the U.S. Embassy, the American Chamber of Commerce, and a number of U.S. corporations and academic institutions operating in Slovakia.



In 2002 David French, a Denver entrepreneur, established a non-profit organization dedicated to youth leadership development. Jan Benetin, a young Slovak who had lived in Colorado as part of an exchange program, registered this organization, Orbis Institute, in Slovakia a year later. Both cooperating Orbis Institutes have conducted numerous training sessions and motivational courses for young people around the world. Vladimir Schmidt is currently Director of Orbis Slovakia.

- *David French, founder, Orbis Institute.*
- *Jake Slegers, executive director, American Chamber of Commerce Slovakia.*



Activities of the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava

Following Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO, the amount of funds the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava was able to allocate to supporting civil society was reduced considerably. During this period, the U.S. Embassy focused particularly on supporting projects by those NGOs that specialize in combating corruption, sharing reform experience, and providing development aid abroad. There are many examples of such projects: the People

in Peril civic association carried out projects in Afghanistan and Georgia aimed at furthering the rights of women and developing civic advocacy skills; the Pontis Foundation was supported in its effort to share specific reform experiences with partner organizations in two Serbian regions; the Center of Community Organizing from Banská Bystrica provided training in Albania in the field of civic mobilization and participation in decision-making processes on the local level; the Carpathian Foundation received support for a project aimed at sharing experiences in the field of interdepartmental cooperation and corporate philanthropy with partner subjects in neighboring Ukraine.

The U.S. Embassy also encouraged American corporations operating in Slovakia to get involved in tackling problems on the national as well as the local level. An example of this effort was a conference held in May 2008 in Prešov that was jointly organized by U.S. Steel Košice and the American Chamber of Commerce. Its ambition was to spark a broad public discussion on employing people who have been jobless for a long time; long-term unemployment is a serious and complex problem in Slovakia that primarily concerns the Roma. U.S. corporations that operate in the region (including Whirlpool or U.S. Steel) responded by exploring new ways to increase Romani employment.

In 2008, the U.S. Embassy supported the emergence of Slovakia of Ours, an informal network of young professionals who studied or worked in the United States and returned to Slovakia. In addition to other activities, group members organize seminars and workshops for university students in order to share practical experience with them.

In 2009, the U.S. Embassy nominated Fair-Play Alliance Director Zuzana Wienk for the International Woman of Courage Award that is annually bestowed by the U.S. State Department to women from all around the world who have manifested extraordinary courage in actively promoting the rights of women. Wienk was nominated for her exceptional efforts in promoting the transparent performance of public officials and combating corruption; in the course of her career, Wienk has been repeatedly attacked by various politicians and officials she has criticized.

- *Lenka Surotchak, director, Pontis Foundation.*



Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE Trust)

- Peter Medved, director, Ekopolis Foundation.



During this period, a consortium of six major American foundations – comprising the Open Society Institute, the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the German Marshall Fund, the Ford Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies – was the most generous U.S. donor to support Slovak NGOs. Most funds were allocated to support projects and, in some cases, institutional sustainability. The list of supported organizations included, for instance, the Center for Philanthropy non-profit organization, the Pontis Foundation, the Ekopolis Foundation, the Open Society Foundation, the Partners for Democratic Change, the Via Iuris foundation, the People in Peril civic association, the Milan Šimečka foundation, the Charter 77 Foundation, Citizen and Democracy, the First Non-Profit Center, Transparency International Slovakia, the Institute for Economic and Social Reforms (INEKO), the Institute for Public Affairs, the Institute of Economic and Social Studies (INESS), the Donors Forum, and Friends of Earth-CEPA, among others. In terms of focus, most projects that were supported were aimed at backing advocacy and anti-corruption activities of NGOs, providing legal counseling, protecting human rights, tackling problems of the Roma, and promoting donorship and inter-sectoral cooperation.

- Marcel Zajac (left) and Boris Strečanský (director), Center for Philanthropy.





- *Laura Dittel, director, Carpathian Foundation. Photo: author's archive*



- *Alena Pániková, director, Open Society Foundation.*

_ BASIC HALLMARKS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (2006–2010)

After massive development aid programs financed by the U.S. government such as DemNet or Your Land had been terminated, the programs sponsored by American foundations were gradually scaled down as well. Despite certain deficiencies, Slovakia had become a standard European democratic country, and the United States no longer saw any reason to invest massive funds into developing the country's civil society. Certain limited funds were provided to NGOs that specialized in promoting transparency in public life, as well as domestic philanthropy and volunteerism.

During this period, young academic and non-governmental leaders emerged on the scene (for example, the Euro-Atlantic Center, the Slovak Atlantic Commission, and the Center of North American Studies) and helped to develop transatlantic relations in an innovative way.

Last but not least, there was a continuous effort to build U.S.-Slovak partnerships aimed at facilitating democratization changes in third countries, particularly in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

• Unfinished tenure of the
Iveta Radičová administration

(2010–2012)



The forming of a relatively homogeneous center-right ruling coalition in 2010 led by Iveta Radičová inspired positive emotions and expectations within a significant share of the population. Radičová pledged to bring expertise into politics and to increase justice within society without compromises. Moreover, the new prime minister announced that her administration would be open to cooperation with civil society, the sphere from which she came and which she understood better than any of her predecessors. She introduced the post of government plenipotentiary for the development of civil society, and her cabinet also subscribed to the Open Government Partnership, a program announced by U.S. President Barack Obama.

Several analysts warned that the composition of the conservative-liberal ruling coalition and its very thin parliamentary majority may in time lead to practical problems. The risks were further heightened by the style of governance and the unusual division of power between the prime minister and her party boss Dzurinda, who held the post of foreign minister in her cabinet. In the end, forecasts of instability turned out to be true.

The political and economic crisis within the EU escalated during this period, mostly due to the critical degree of indebtedness of some EU member states, serving to threaten the financial stability of the eurozone. The financial aid provided to critically indebted Greece became the acid test not only for the cohesiveness of the EU but also for the Slovak cabinet. Representatives of the ruling Freedom and Solidarity party began to criticize and oppose the bailout package for Greece. In October 2011, Prime Minister Radičová decided to bet everything on a single card and tied the vote on Slovakia's participation in extending the loan to Greece to a vote of confidence in her cabinet. The proposal was rejected, and the Radičová administration fell.

For the first time in the country's modern history, the fall of government was caused not by domestic but by international factors. Being part of the EU, Slovakia paid a toll for the turbulences in the community of European democracies. Based on an agreement among most relevant political parties, Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič announced early parliamentary elections for March 2012.

The election campaign became an arena for two principal political forces: the opposition Smer-SD led by Fico on the one hand and the parties of the ruling coalition debilitated by mutual quarrels on the other. Prime Minister Radičová announced she would not run for re-election and would leave politics after the early elections.

Public opinion polls consistently indicated citizens' disenchantment and indifference toward politics. Even representatives of the country's third sector were greatly disillusioned because of many dashed expectations. Gorilla and Sasanka, two corruption scandals suggesting personal alliances between Slovakia's top politicians and business circles, exploded like bombs in this bleak atmosphere. The most indignant citizens began to organize via social networks and staged demonstrations in a number of major Slovak towns. The Gorilla scandal had a fundamental influence on the character of the election campaign, voter mobilization, as well as the outcome of the elections.

In the end, almost 60 percent of eligible voters came to the polling stations. The unexpectedly strong election victory of Smer-SD catapulted Fico back to the post of prime minister. This time, he did not have to rely on coalition partners and instead formed a single-party administration.

EXAMPLES OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (2010–2012)

State Department's emphasis on civil society

Under the leadership of Hillary Clinton, the U.S. State Department came up with new initiatives aimed at establishing more effective cooperation with non-governmental actors around the world. In August 2011, the Secretary State's Senior Advisor for Civil Society and Emerging Democracies Tomicah Tillemann visited Bratislava to meet with Government Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society Filip Vagač as well as NGO representatives who had experience with foreign activities. The U.S. administration's main goal was to determine the interest and capacity of Slovak NGOs in sharing their experience with new

democracies, including Western Balkan, post-Soviet, and Arab countries. Tillemann expressed strong interest in cooperation with several Slovak experts from the non-governmental sector. He also praised Slovakia for taking part in the Open Government Partnership program initiated by President Obama.

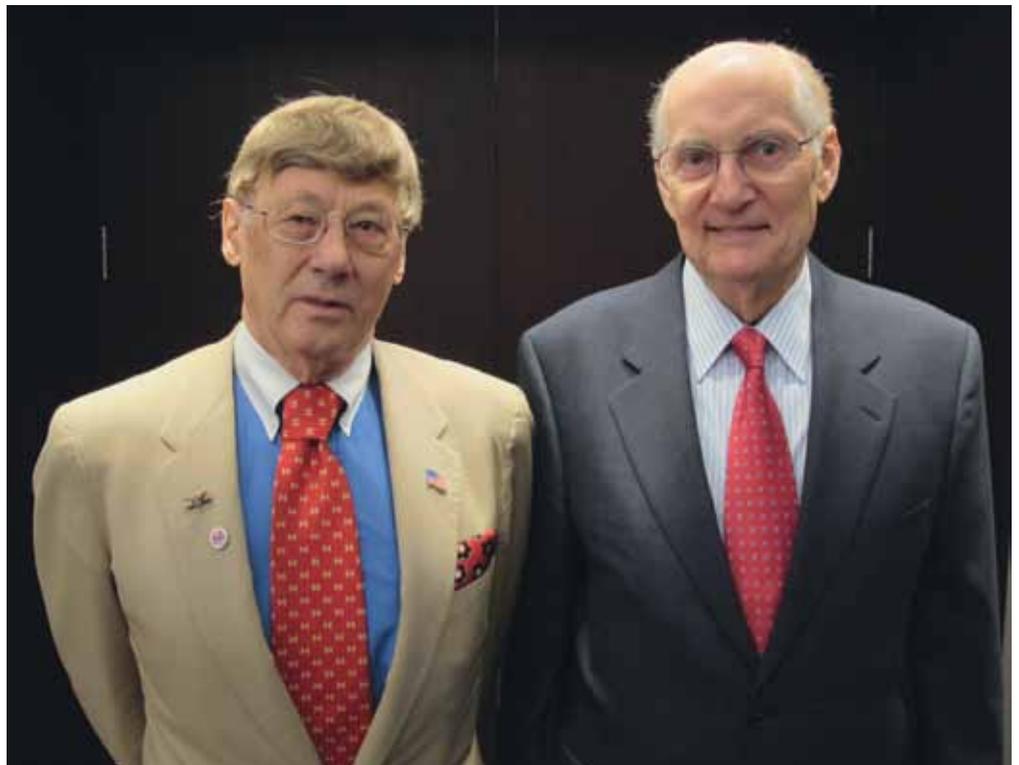


- *Tomica Tillemann, Secretary of State Clinton's Senior Advisor for Civil Society and Emerging Democracies.*

Discussion at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Volunteer projects implemented within the Peace Corps program ranked among the most effective projects of U.S. assistance provided to Slovakia after the Velvet Revolution. Established in 1961 based on an initiative by U.S. President John F. Kennedy, the principal mission of the Peace Corps was to promote peace and mutual understanding and cultivate the spirit of volunteerism and civic engagement. More than 320 Peace Corps volunteers worked in Slovakia from 1990–2002 (Stephan Hanchey, Robert Blenker, Ed Block, Nelson Chase and Phil Stantial served as Country Directors), focusing primarily on three areas: support for small and medium-sized enterprise, environmental protection, and education.

- *The leaders of Friends of Slovakia: William Tucker, president, (left) and Theodore Russell, founding chairman.*



Thanks to an initiative by the Friends of Slovakia and the Slovak Embassy in the United States, a panel discussion took place at the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. in May 2011, during which former volunteers and representatives of U.S. and Slovak NGOs assessed the program's impact on the development of civil society in Slovakia and on U.S.-Slovak cooperation. Panelists also discussed development aid provided to third countries. Slovak guests appearing on the panel included Pontis Foundation Director Lenka Surotchak and Government Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society Filip Vagač. The list of American discussants included Foundation for a Civil Society President Wendy Luers, National Endowment for Democracy Director for Europe and Eurasia Rodger Potocki, and the Secretary of State's Senior Advisor for Civil Society and Emerging Democracies Tomicah Tillemann.

Activities of the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava

The U.S. Embassy in Slovakia continued to cooperate with NGOs specializing in the development of transatlantic relations such as the Slovak Atlantic Commission and a handful of think tanks. In June 2011, U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Theodore Sedgwick opened a summer school for young professionals organized by the Center for European and North American Relations. The program was attended by 26 participants from 16 Central and East European countries.

In addition, the embassy remained focused on combating corruption. It financially supported Transparency International Slovakia. Moreover, the embassy nominated Via Iuris foundation's counselor Zuzana Čaputová for the International Woman of Courage Award in May 2011 for her long-term involvement in the controversial case of the Pezinok waste dump.

In 2010, the embassy pooled all remaining funds originally allocated to supporting the country's economic transformation after the fall of communism to establish the Slovak-American Foundation, which supports study trips to the United States. Students and fresh graduates as well as professors and researchers from Slovak universities are eligible to apply for scholarships. According to embassy officials' estimates, the foundation's resources will run out within five years.

In February 2011, the U.S. Embassy and InfoUSA in cooperation with the Open Society Foundation began to organize Face 2 Face, a periodic series of recorded public discussions on relevant social and political issues.

Postoy.sk wins the Templeton Award

In October 2011 Postoy.sk, an online magazine published by the Central European Business and Social Initiative (CEBSI) received the Templeton Freedom Award, a prestigious international honor bestowed by the Atlas Economic Research Foundation. Postoy.sk won in the "Ethics and Values" category; the victory came with a \$10,000 grant. The list of Slovak NGOs that won the award in the past includes the Institute for Economic and Social Analyses (2010), the Conservative Institute of M. R. Štefánik (2007) and the F. A. Hayek foundation (2004).

Activities pursued by the CEBSI are based on universal principles of the free market, personal responsibility, private enterprise, and solidarity. Established in 2007, the CEBSI organizes educational programs, seminars, conferences, and public lectures. The director of the CEBSI is Ondrej Sočuvka, and the list of its honorary advisors includes, for instance, Michael Novak of the American Enterprise Institute. The CEBSI actively cooperates with experts from the Acton Institute, the Fund for American Studies, and the Atlas Economic Research Foundation.

_ BASIC HALLMARKS OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (2010–2012)

The United States and Slovakia, which had in the meantime become a full-fledged member of the EU and the eurozone, acted as equal partners during this period. Slovakia's civil society continued to develop primarily on the back of support from domestic (i.e. governmental, corporate, and individual donors) and

European sources. On the other hand, American financial support had become seriously limited.

Both countries jointly overcome various phenomena of the painful economic crisis that befell the transatlantic community. Another platform where the interests of Slovakia and the United States intersect is democratization assistance provided to third countries. Besides traditional territories such as the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, their attention increasingly focused also on North African countries, especially following the so-called Arab Spring. In the field of democratization assistance, a number of Slovak NGOs have cooperated with representatives of the Slovak and sometimes also with the U.S. diplomatic corps.

(spring-fall 2012)

- **Eve of the 20th anniversary
of the independent Slovakia**

For the first time since the collapse of the communist regime, Slovakia is ruled by a single-party government. Within several months of seizing power, the Fico administration made clear that its style of governance will differ from his first tenure when he shared power with Vladimír Mečiar and Ján Slota. The incumbent administration declared its clear pro-European and pro-Atlantic orientation and showed an accommodating approach toward non-governmental subjects.

As a full-fledged EU member state, Slovakia is facing rather unpredictable threats ensuing from financial problems within the eurozone as well as from potential political changes within the EU. In this situation, Fico and his administration are striving for a consensual style of governance, both politically and socially, which is being appreciated by the media as well as representatives of the third sector. When forming his cabinet, Fico invited three non-party personalities to take part, and when formulating its program manifesto he respected the insights provided by non-political subjects such as employers' associations, trade unions, and representatives of the academic, scientific, and religious communities. Following an initial exchange of opinions, the incumbent administration has also adopted an accommodating approach to civil society as it agreed to continue projects introduced by the previous administration, including the Open Government Partnership, the post of government plenipotentiary for development of civil society, and government councils for NGOs and minorities.

The five center-right opposition parties in parliament are currently in the process of internal differentiation and seeking a common platform. The future will test their effectiveness in the political arena.

Slovakia is beginning to prepare for celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of gaining independence. The Slovak Government and its Czech counterpart are planning to hold a symbolic joint cabinet session in order to manifest the lasting friendship between two sovereign countries, full-fledged members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance.

GLOBSEC conference

The seventh edition of GLOBSEC that took place in Bratislava in April 2012 was the largest and most representative conference on foreign policy and security issues held in Slovakia to date. Organized by the Slovak Atlantic Commission in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, the conference in its innovative format was attended by approximately 500 guests from over 40 countries, including prominent experts, political leaders and members of U.S. armed forces. The conference was financially supported by several U.S. corporations and foundations. At the final gala, the conference in memoriam awarded world-renowned American analyst Ronald Asmus for his essential contribution to NATO enlargement and transatlantic cooperation.

- *James S. Denton (left), president, World Affairs Institute and Damon Wilson, vice president, Atlantic Council at GLOBSEC Conference, Bratislava, 2012.*

Meanwhile, the SAC agreed on a partnership with the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), a think-tank based in Washington, D.C.



Cooperation in third countries

In spring 2012, the intergovernmental Community of Democracies accommodated a new networking initiative called Leaders Engaged in New Democracies (LEND), a project jointly initiated by the U.S. State Department and the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its principal ambition is to apply modern communication technologies (e.g. video-conference) to help leaders of countries that recently experienced democratic changes to connect with and receive practical advice from people who have a fresh experience with decentralization of power following the fall of an authoritarian regime. The international network of advisors should also include the following representatives of Slovakia's civil society: Martin Bútorá, Pavol Demeš, Rastislav Kužel, Dušan Ondrušek, Boris Strečanský, Filip Vagač and Zuzana Wienk.

Grant support for NGOs

Between 2010 and 2012, the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe extended final grants to Slovak NGOs. Scheduled to terminate its activity in Slovakia in December 2012, the Trust has disbursed funds in the total amount of \$7.6 million to 70 projects since 2001. The final grants went to the Fair Play Alliance, the Citizen, Democracy and Accountability civic association, the Center for Philanthropy non-profit organization, Pontis and

- *Janet Livingstone (left), NGO expert, and Lucia Faltinová, executive director of the Slovak Donors Forum.*



Via Iuris foundations and the Institute for Good Governance. Most grants were aimed at strengthening advocacy skills of NGOs, raising legal awareness and promoting the spirit of giving.

In terms of the scope of activities, Open Society Foundation remains the most important granting-operating foundation in Slovakia that is still financed from the United States. Besides funds provided by philanthropist George Soros, the foundation also receives financial support from European sources. In 2011, Open Society Foundation spent more than €1,500,000 on its operating and granting activities. It extends grants to non-governmental organizations whose projects are aimed at education, promoting human rights and equalizing opportunities of disadvantaged citizens with a special emphasis on specific needs of the Roma. The program East East: Partnership beyond Borders supports international meetings aimed at sharing practical socio-political experience among central and eastern European countries.

Activities of the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava

On May 16, 2012, the U.S. Embassy in Slovakia held a meeting of embassy employees with representatives of Slovak NGOs. Through a video-conference link, meeting participants first listened to an address by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who spoke on civil society in the global context. Subsequently, they examined the current condition of the third sector in Slovakia and its cooperation with the incumbent Róbert Fico administration, which seems to show similar openness to dialogue with civil society subjects as the previous administration led by Iveta Radičová. The meeting was also attended by Government Plenipotentiary for Development of Civil Society Filip Vagač who remained in his post even after the change in government.

Besides the third sector, U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Theodore Sedgwick pays special attention to universities and young people, which may be illustrated by the first discussion meeting in Banská Bystrica titled "Ambassador Sedgwick's Youth Advisory Council" that was jointly organized by the Euro-Atlantic Center at Matej Bel University and the U.S. Embassy. It was attended by approximately 35 young people who discussed three principal issues with Ambassador Sedgwick: education in Slovakia, civic participation and the role of the United States in Central Europe and Slovakia.



- *Ambassador Theodore Sedgwick (right), meeting with representatives of Slovak NGOs at U.S. Embassy, Bratislava, 2012.*



- *Filip Vagač (left), Slovak government's plenipotentiary for civil society at the U.S. Embassy, Bratislava, 2012.*

U.S. Steel Košice Foundation

U.S. Steel Košice Foundation continues to focus on supporting pro bono projects in the field of health care, education, science, culture and charity. For philanthropic activities pursued over the past decade, U.S. Steel Košice Foundation received the Award for Corporate Excellence bestowed by the U.S. State Department, the Via Bona Slovakia award bestowed by Pontis foundation or the Most (Bridge) award for long-term systematic work with children and young people. The foundation also won the Proficient at School – Successful in Life competition for its innovative cooperation aimed at developing Slovakia's education system or the award bestowed by the Profit bi-weekly for a project with exceptional impact on development of business education.

Currently, civil society in Slovakia does not receive significant financial support from the United States and relies primarily on domestic and European sources like civil society in other European democracies. Nevertheless, mutual partnerships and alliances between Slovakia and the United States continue to deepen, particularly in the field of overcoming effects of the global economic crisis in the Euro-Atlantic space and catalyzing democratization changes in third countries.

The character of Slovak-American relations at the beginning of the third decade of Slovakia's independent existence may well be illustrated on two examples: first, the GLOBSEC international conference that took place in Bratislava in April 2012; second, the official visit of Slovakia's Foreign Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajčák to the United States in July 2012.

U.S. politicians and experts who attended the seventh edition of GLOBSEC highly appreciated professionalism and expertise of Slovakia's civil society and especially the private-public partnership in the field of foreign and security policy.

During his official visit to Washington, D.C., internationally acclaimed diplomat Miroslav Lajčák met not only with U.S. Secretary of State and Slovakia's special friend Hillary Clinton but also with representatives of American civil society and expert community. Like its U.S. counterpart, Slovakia's incumbent administration is clearly aware of the importance of civil society and strives to improve conditions for effective performance of NGOs within the domain of domestic public policies as well as development aid.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, Americans entered new territories and began to help those citizens of Central and East European countries who yearned to build a decent society and return to a democratic Europe after decades of totalitarianism. It was an unprecedented chapter in the history of international relations for which there had been no previous experience or guidebooks at hand. What was not lacking was goodwill and enthusiasm on both shores of the Atlantic.

I am sure that when looking at this collective portrait of people involved, many readers did not find their names and faces or the names and faces of other important actors although they had been part and parcel of the entire process. This would not surprise me at all, even though I tried to paint the portrait as best as I could. The thing is that this 22-year long story is far too fascinating and multi-faceted; also, memories have an unfortunate habit to fade out just like pictures in a photo album. Although I did my best to refresh them through my archive and extensive interviews with friends and former colleagues, the scope of this publication simply did not allow me to encompass more. Still, I remain open to suggestions of missing names, and I promise to include them in future editions.

U.S. assistance in Slovakia has many singularities and specifics. Not even the 40 years of communist brainwashing were able to erase the natural ties that in the long term bond the two countries, either through historical context or human contact. The United States – where hundreds of thousands of Slovaks emigrated in the times of economic or political hardship – is where one may find not only the birth certificate of former Czechoslovakia but also the values that form the foundations of modern, democratic Slovakia.

Right after the Velvet Revolution, the United States was sensitive to the fact that Czechoslovakia consisted of two republics. Long before it became apparent that their political representatives would fail to reach consensus over the new model of their coexistence, U.S. assistance had focused on both republics separately. Despite initial anxiety, the United States respected the highly-cultured "Velvet Divorce" and officially recognized both independent states immediately after the dissolution of the

Czecho-Slovak Federation. In the early years of independent Slovakia's existence, though, U.S. assistance programs focused on socio-political reforms were implemented under rather complicated conditions as they encountered an unexpected obstacle in the form of a neo-authoritarian regime that was oversensitive to criticism from domestic or foreign circles, which it suspected of "financing the destruction of the republic." The United States withstood attacks by the Mečiar regime and relentlessly continued to support democratic forces whose honest interest was the development of open society and Slovakia's integration into the family of European democracies.

Civil society has played a crucial role in Slovakia's democratization and modernization; the activities of its prominent personalities and leading subjects were made possible especially thanks to support from U.S. private and public subjects. U.S. assistance was sustained well after 1998 when Slovakia had returned to the democratic track and had begun to prepare for full-fledged EU and NATO membership. After the country joined both organizations in spring 2004, independent U.S. foundations as well as official government programs re-evaluated their assistance strategies and began to scale down support provided to Slovakia as well as to other successful post-communist countries. Bilateral relations between the two countries have since continued to evolve, and today they may be described by three words: friendship, partnership and alliance.

Two decades since the emergence of the independent Slovakia, the limited U.S. assistance provided to Slovak NGOs focuses primarily on combating corruption, enhancing the judicial system, improving the social status of Roma, and education. At the same time, the Slovak Republic and the United States cooperate in helping third countries in their endeavor to build stable and prosperous societies.

I believe that this Slovak-American story holds many lessons to be learned, especially for those who are interested in foreign aid programs but also for those who specialize in broader aspects of international relations. Here I mention the top 10:

1. Foreign assistance to countries that have decided to build an open political system only works if it is honestly desired by a sufficient number of people, including political leaders as well as ordinary citizens.

2. It is important to provide assistance to the development of civil society not only via governmental programs but also via non-governmental subjects and volunteers who generally help increase the level of flexibility, spontaneity and innovation.
3. In order to put through fundamental reforms, it is necessary to provide parallel support to democratically-minded politicians, independent media and non-governmental organizations.
4. The subjects providing assistance to countries that have embarked on the path toward freedom should make sure to sustain their support even when local elected political leaders begin to abuse power and the democratic system. It is civil society actors who are an important impediment to the violation of the rule of law and constitutionality.
5. Slovakia has been lucky that democratization assistance provided by the USA and the EU was complementary as it was based on identical principles such as respect for human rights and political and civil freedoms.
6. From the very outset, the assistance provided to Slovakia was closely related to the open invitation to join democratic transatlantic groupings, namely the European Union and NATO. A clear and unambiguous definition of the framework of provided assistance is needed if people are to believe in it and identify themselves with it.
7. In every country, civil society has a specific influence on democratic changes which is determined by history, culture and mentality of local people. While it is possible to transfer experience from other countries and regions, the process itself also has its limitations.
8. The most effective actors in the process of transferring reform experience are those who may rely on direct (i.e. personal) experience, be it political activism or philanthropic experience.
9. Democratization assistance is an art rather than a science as it requires patience, tenacity, intuition and devotion to humanist principles.
10. Slovakia has definitively joined the ranks of successful post-communist countries; however, even after two decades of hard work it is way too early for self-complacency. People's confidence in the system's fairness is disturbingly low and the condition of economy, health service and education system continues to deteriorate. Besides, Slovakia along with the United States and other EU member states is facing several unparalleled challenges; Slovakia must tackle the new problems hand in hand with the entire democratic community of which it is an integral part.



Afterword by Boris Strečanský Director of the Center for Philanthropy, Bratislava

As I read through this text, I remembered some good advice from Associate Professor Herta Tkadlečková, a teacher of rare talent in the Department of General History at Comenius University's Faculty of Arts. In those hectic days of November 1989 she urged her eager students: "Keep your diaries, record everything you see happening around you; if you fail to capture the moment, it will pass into oblivion and that will be a pity."

I have often thought about this piece of advice for two reasons: one, because I take it as a just reproach to myself as I certainly was not disciplined enough to follow it; and two, because many of those who participated in the exciting political changes after 1989 events died and those who are gone did exactly what my dear teacher had warned her students about: they took their memories, their experience and their knowledge with them. This is the context in which I perceive the most recent creative initiative by Pavol Demeš. It represents a retrospective glance at our recent past or, if you like, contemporary history that continues to unfold before our own eyes.

Pavol Demeš was one of the important actors who helped build civil society in Slovakia; he does not conceal this fact but does not try to embellish it either. I imagine it was this quality that enabled him to review this historical period and its developments without excessive emotion and with due objectivity. His effort turned out well. The author's detailed knowledge of the issue via first-hand experience helped him gather the information and arrange it logically. He has managed to put together a solid factual base and plant it into the political context of the period.

However this publication is significant not only because it attempts to render an account of historical events. It is rather difficult to write about contemporary history, mainly because we are among the actors who shape it and are influenced by it. We are rarely able to keep a proper distance. But this should not prevent us from trying as it is the attempts to capture history in which our modern identity is formed. It is the effort to create shared consciousness of our time in which the narrative of the period is shaped. And that is another important dimension of the book by Pavol Demeš as it contributes to understanding the multi-faceted nature of the modern Slovak identity, which is no longer characterized by the double cross, folklore and the Tatra Mountains but increasingly by the struggle for citizens' gradual emancipation from government as well as the ethos of association and assistance.

While the history of civil society in Slovakia did not precisely begin to unfold in 1989, this year was a true landmark. The United States played a truly important role in its development since the Velvet revolution. Dr. Demeš' approach to this issue will certainly attract social scientists' attention in the future. This publication is sure to be of great help in their research and endeavors to understand our time.

Afterword by Zuzana Szatmáry Director of The Charter 77 Foundation

• The Big Country

"Wow, I'm so happy!" a pretty visiting professor from Vermont named Laura said as she was enjoying the gravel-covered nude beach on the outskirts of Bratislava in late August. When a person spends forty days among a group of people, he or she becomes one of them.

"Your Kofola (traditional Slovak soft drink) tastes better than Coke and I can enjoy a cigarette with a glass of wine. Not to mention the non-punishable nudity. What a sweet freedom!" "Well, this is not a general phenomenon, you know," I remarked as I was enjoying the crystal clear water. "It is just an opportunity to enjoy these things. The possibility to make a choice in some areas that you don't have and the impossibility to make a choice in most of the decisions that you, thank God, have." "Do you think that this is the reason for love as well as hatred toward America?" Laura asked as I emerged from the water. "Maybe it is. But it's a stupid reason. It reminds me of a stupid parent who gets angry when his rebellious teenager surpasses him a hundred times over in adulthood. Instead of being proud of the son's achievements, the parent is angry. Europe and America have things to share and to take. The bond does not necessarily have to be limiting; it can be a supporting rope on the journey towards the peaks."

"What are you two discussing,?" "Interpret it for us," Viktor, a fireman, and Stefan, a carpenter, demanded. "You're right," they said after they discussed the issue with others. "The only thing remaining is to decide what should be done about the situation." "I know," I said and I dived into the water.

Go and observe!

At the beginning of the 1990s we, as responsible revolutionaries (what an oxymoron!), administered U.S. funds assigned to help develop the new Slovak democracy. A young dentist known for his extreme nationalism, racism and his father – a devoted communist who had persecuted me in the past - announced me that he was quite certain that I would not support his application for a U.S.-paid internship at an Israeli clinic. "On the contrary," I said, "it is people like you who need this sort of internship more than most others. You're going." After six months he wrote in his closing report: "I was a jerk but I'm not any more." He was right. He is not.

We also made use of the opportunity to send members of the newly-established Slovak parliament for a two-month internship in the U.S.. We refused to send some of our more enlightened democrats because I think that an enlightened person is obliged to make his own light. We offered each parliamentary party,

including the extremely nationalistic one, the opportunity to send a person of their choice for a two-month internship in the United States. The people who went returned inspired by that big country, and their inspiration resulted not in big words but in positive political acts. Except for one person. He didn't even speak English. He ran up over two thousand dollars worth of phone calls to his native village. The parliament had to keep its stiff upper lip and pay for the bills. However, the party that the talker represented is not a parliamentary party any longer.

You will know them by their works

Literature had helped me to establish contacts with whatever country or foreigner. American literature equipped me better than if I'd had the training that diplomats receive. It taught me to understand connections, diversities and challenges of the American land just as Russian literature provides tools for understanding another big country. However, each intellectual needs to be capable of a self-reflective recognition that his opinion and attitude usually do not represent generally accepted points of reference and that all opinions and attitudes are worthless unless they are transformed into works.

Speaking about works, I often met with Pavol Demeš. The first impression of his book, *A Collective Portrait*, chronicling American and Slovak relationships is that it is written in a matter-of-fact style. But this is only the first impression. For years I have admired Pavol Demeš's great capability to listen. After listening carefully he suddenly hits the nail on the head and acts purposefully. The objectivity and accuracy of his book dramatically underline the enriching bond accompanying the exciting climbs (and yes, it is also a safety rope needed for descents and falls).

The Big Country (this is a reference to a Gregory Peck movie) and its people have a great responsibility – whether it is aware of this or not. Not only a responsibility towards itself. The United States has the duty to deal with the responsibility they have been given. This is its opportunity to make a choice. American big country that has always been following the moral principles it was built on offers openness of its society as well as vertical and horizontal movement of its people. It is the openness that is needed for effective functioning of each system. A small country with genes affected by several totalitarian and authoritative regimes often only enables intensive movement of mind and soul; however in many circumstances they can be significant and inspiring. For example, it can provide an enriching experience or recognition of issues signaling a threat to a system.

A Collective Portrait by Pavol Demeš confirms that the results of twenty years of the United States and Slovakia working in tandem have not only been Shakespeare's "words, words, words". They have also to some extent reflected the biblical principle of "You will know them by their works". Viktor, the fireman, Laura, the professor, and Stefan, the carpenter agree with me on this fact, and it is not only they who do.

Pavol Demeš is an internationally recognized NGO leader and analyst based in Bratislava, Slovakia. Prior to the "Velvet Revolution" in November 1989, Demeš was a bio-medical researcher at Comenius University in Bratislava. He is a graduate of Charles University, Prague (1980) and spent one year as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of South Alabama in Mobile (1987-88). After the democratic changes of 1989, he served as the Director of the Department of International Relations at the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic and as the Executive Director of the Slovak Academic Information Agency-Service Center for the Third Sector. He also served as Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of the Slovak Republic (1993-97), and from 1991-92 he was the Slovak Minister of International Relations. In 1999, he was awarded a six-month public policy research fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington D.C. From 2000 until September 2010, he was the Director for Central and Eastern Europe of the German Marshall Fund (GMF) of the United States based in Bratislava. Currently, he is a non-resident senior fellow with GMF.

He received the EU-US Democracy and Civil Society Award (1998), the USAID Democracy and Governance Award (1999), the Royal Dutch decoration, Knight of the Order of Orange Nassau (2005), Yugoslav Star of First Class (2005), South East Europe Media Organization Human Rights Award (2009) and the Friends of Slovakia Medal of Honor (2011).

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