

Pivka Plaque Unveiling

May 27, 2014

Remarks by Ambassador Joseph A. Mussomeli

Good afternoon! I am delighted to be here to commemorate and celebrate the long and abiding military relationship between our two countries--as Allies, as partners, and as friends. This relationship goes back 70 years, to World War II, when Allied forces supported the Yugoslav partisans in their effort to expel the invading and occupying troops of Nazi Germany. Today, the United States is proud to have supported those efforts to bring about an end to the fighting in this part of Europe, and to have supported the liberation of the region from fascist oppression after four hard years of war. It wasn't easy, it wasn't quick, but I don't have to tell you that together we brought about the end of the fascist regimes.

One of the noblest chapters in this history is the rescuing of downed Allied pilots--American and British--throughout the territory of Slovenia. The air campaign over former Yugoslavia was intense and there was much destruction and loss of life. But when Allied airmen were shot down over Yugoslav territory, local citizens and partisan forces made every effort to rescue these pilots and get them to safety--at considerable risk to themselves. I have visited several of these rescue sites in Slovenia because remembering the past helps us understand the present and deepens our relationship and commitment to each other.

Another chapter of this history that bears remembering is our military cooperation during the height of the Cold War. Starting in the late 1940s, once Tito had finally broken with Stalin, the United States engaged postwar Yugoslavia across the board--politically, economically, and militarily. My government sought to maintain the country's independence from Soviet domination for both selfish and altruistic reasons: certainly in order to prevent Soviet hegemony, but also to ensure your sovereignty and independence. The Tito regime was far from perfect, but in countering Soviet aggression we remained partners. In the early 1950s, economic and food aid increased dramatically to over \$100 million per year or nearly a billion dollars in today's money. On the military side, the United States provided assistance in the form of training and equipment--some of which you will find included in the exhibitions of this museum. This discouraged Soviet meddling in the country at that critical time. The situation in Ukraine today is a useful reminder of the importance of maintaining a strong deterrent to such outside interference.

After over three and half years in this country, I have come to have great respect for the modern Slovenian military. I see them working with Americans side-by-side, contributing to international missions such as KFOR in Kosovo and ISAF in Afghanistan. The United States values such contributions and sees in them realization of Slovenia's commitment to NATO and the principle of shared sacrifice. I am grateful for my good friend Minister Jakic's leadership of the ministry and for the superb professionalism of today's Slovenian armed forces, embodied in your Chief of Defense, Dobran Bozic. I love the idea of planting this linden tree here at the museum, especially in light of the recent devastation caused by February's ice storm. I see this tree as a symbol of our enduring friendship: with some care, enough watering, and plenty of sunlight and fresh air, our relationship will prosper and grow and provide a secure future for all of us.