

News From the Vaclav Havel Civil Society Symposium

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Contacts: Teddy Altman, House of Hope Church (651) 223-7541
Kent Wilson, M.D., chairman, Havel Civil Society Symposium (651) 698-8494
Jim Winterer, University of St. Thomas (651) 962-6404

Vaclav Havel Civil Society program will bring Slovak scholar-diplomats to Twin Cities as visiting scholars

Martin Butora and Zora Butorova will visit here Oct. 5 to 12

St. Paul, Minn. – A Slovak couple who were deeply involved in the 1989 Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and later with the creation of the Slovak Republic in 1993 will spend a week in the Twin Cities this fall as visiting scholars in a program that evolved from the Vaclav Havel Civil Society Symposium.

Dr. Martin Butora, honorary president of the Institute for Public Affairs, an independent think tank in Bratislava, Slovakia, and his wife, Dr. Zora Butorova, a resident scholar at the institute, will begin their visit to the Twin Cities on Oct. 6.

The Vaclav Havel Civil Society Symposium was established in 1999 to encourage discussion on the rights and responsibilities of citizens. The biennial symposium brought to Minnesota noted speakers that included former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Havel, who was the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first president of the Czech Republic.

Under the new program, prominent scholars and leaders visit Minnesota for more extended periods. Martin Palous, the Czech Republic's ambassador to the United Nations, visited the Twin Cities in 2006; Dr. Thomas Gouttierre, dean of international studies at the University of Nebraska, visited here in 2007.

The visiting scholar program is a partnership of the University of St. Thomas and the House of Hope Presbyterian Church in cooperation with the Minnesota Czech and Slovak communities. During their visit, Butora and Butorova will speak at the House of Hope, meet with media, and participate in a host of classes, seminars and programs at St. Thomas.

Martin Butora has been a university professor, diplomat and ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the United States. He received doctorates in sociology from Comenius University in Bratislava and Charles University in Prague. In 1989 he was a founder of Public Against Violence, the leading Slovak force in the Velvet Revolution. He later served as an adviser on human rights to President Havel. He was awarded the Democracy Service medal from the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, D.C., and a Celebration of Freedom Award from the American Jewish Committee.

Zora Butorova also holds a doctorate in sociology from Comenius University. One of the key figures in public opinion research in Slovakia, she is the author of many studies and articles on political culture in post-Communist Czechoslovakia and Slovakia, on people's attitudes regarding Slovakia's transition to democracy, and on the changes in women's lives and in gender relations after the fall of communism.

Public events scheduled at the House of Hope, 797 Summit Ave., are:

- Martin Butora will discuss "The U.S. and the New Europe: The Imperative for a New Partnership" at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 8. This foreign affairs address is co-sponsored by the Minnesota Chapter of the United Nations Association and the Minnesota International Center.
- The couple will speak at the 10 a.m. service and participate in an 11 a.m. program, "Characteristics and Challenges of Recent Democracies, the Central European Experience," on Sunday, Oct. 12.

Public events scheduled at the St. Paul campus of St. Thomas are:

- The movie "Citizen Havel" will be shown at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 7, in Room 126 of the John R. Roach Center for the Liberal Arts. The center is located on the north side of Summit Avenue, near Cleveland Avenue. The couple will lead a discussion after the film.
- Zora Butorova will speak on "The Role of Women in New Democracies -- at Work, in Politics, in Changing Family Dynamics" at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 9, in Room 100, McNeely Hall. McNeely is located on the south side of Summit Avenue, near Cleveland Avenue.

Finally, a reception for the couple, hosted by the Czech and Slovak Cultural Center of Minnesota, will be held from 3 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 11, at Sokol Hall, 383 Michigan St., St. Paul.

The events are free and open to the public. For general information about the Vaclav Havel Civil Society Symposium, call the Executive Adviser to the President's Office at St. Thomas, (651) 962-6035. Information also is available at: www.hohchurch.org; www.cs-center.org; and www.micglobe.org.