

Consul General of Czech Republic Michal Sedlacek

This week I had the privilege of hearing the Consul General of the Czech Republic, Michal Sedlacek speak at UVU. It was a great opportunity to hear from a foreign dignitary, and he was even kind enough to answer some questions at the end of his speech.

Consul General Sedlacek began his speech by giving us a quick breakdown of the history of the Czech Republic from its creation in 1918, the turmoil of World War II, life under the occupation of the Soviet Union, and life since its return to Democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Consul General told us that the Czech Republic joined the WTO in 1999 with the assistance of then United States President Bill Clinton. I found this to be interesting, as last year the Consul General of Vietnam spoke to UVU, and he explained that President Clinton also helped Vietnam gain admittance to the WTO and World Bank. Bill Clinton obviously made it a priority to help expand the United States role in emerging countries around the world. The Consul General spoke briefly about the Czech Republic's role in the European Union, and how the Czech Republic has agreed to switch the Euro at some point, but they haven't seen fit to make the transition yet.

One of the students in the class asked a great question about how the Czech Republic was able to transition from the rule of the Soviet Union, into a Democratic system of government without losing control of much of its natural resources or other economic resources like many former Soviet Bloc countries did. The Consul General explained that after the Berlin Wall fell, the emerging Czech government provided Czech citizen with a "Coupon Book" which allowed them to purchase shares in the emerging private businesses and industries that were previously under the ownership of the State. This allowed Czech citizens to gain control of their economy and industries without losing these resources to foreign enterprises.

I asked the Consul General about how the Czech Republic views the crisis in the Ukraine, as Russia still maintains a great deal of influence inside the Czech Republic. The Consul General stated that there was 2 parts to his answer, the first in terms of the opinion of the people of the Ukraine, which is sympathy toward Ukrainians, as they had experience with Germany invading the Czech Republic under the guise of "Protecting German citizens and interests there" which is similar to the propaganda that Vladimir Putin is using to justify the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. The 2nd part of the answer had to do with the Diplomatic response to the crisis in the Ukraine, which is in line with the European Union, in terms of sanctioning Russia.

I really enjoyed hearing from the Consul General, and hope that UVU will be able to bring in more guest speakers to provide a global perspective of the Political and Social climate around the world.

Jason Linde, UVU student