SLOVAK REPUBLIC

COUNTRY READER
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CLAIBORNE PELL
Consular Officer
Prague and Bratislava (1945-1948)

Born into a family of diplomats, Claiborne Pell joined the Foreign Service in 1945 after serving in the Coast Guard. His stations included Prague, Bratislava, Genoa, and the Eastern European Desk. This interview was conducted on April 9, 1987.

Q: Did you ask for Czechoslovakia or Eastern Europe?

PELL: No, this was just a random assignment. I know I would have loved to have fulfilled my original assignment, that was as third secretary to Tirana, Albania, but unfortunately our mission was closed at that time and I was sent to Czechoslovakia. Albania is the only country in Europe that I have never visited.

Q: Not many have been there since the war.

PELL: Virtually no Americans have been there.

Q: What were your duties when you first went to Prague?

PELL: I was in the consular section and my duties were to determine who was LPC (Likely Public Charge) [a visa applicant who was likely to be unable to support him or herself] who would get visas and who would not get visas. I was also the protocol officer.

Q: The ambassador there was Laurence Steinhardt, he has been described to me as somewhat a tough character of the old school. How did you find him?

PELL: Laurence Steinhardt was very much an individualist, tough, competent, a lawyer. He started out as a political appointee but acquired a great deal of service and expert knowledge. He was a pretty darned good ambassador, although a fundamental mistake of judgement was made towards the end of my tour of duty there, where it was inevitable to my mind that the Communists would have to have a putsch because they were not going to do as well in the upcoming elections [spring 1948] as they had previously. They and the Soviets could not afford to do worse because they felt that Czechoslovakia was, as the Russians termed it, a "dagger in their side". I know that I predicted such a putsch. I sent a memorandum up [to the embassy from Bratislava] which is a matter of record, to the effect that I felt that there would not be a peaceful turnover of government when the Communists were forced to reduce their strength by the vote [this refers to the scheduled spring elections of 1948 - which never took place due to the Communist takeover in February 1948] and therefor there would have to be a military putsch to avoid such an election. This is just what occurred, but this prediction of mine from Bratislava was not forwarded by the embassy to Washington. I think that the people in the mission put a little too much faith in the Social Democrats and thought they would prevail and they probably would have prevailed if there had been, as I foresaw, a fair election. But, the Communists would not permit a fair election.

Q: I know that just as you arrived in July of 1946 Ambassador Steinhardt was reporting [as published in the Foreign Relations series] that Clement Gottwald was a "a thorough Czech patriot and unlikely to embark on extreme measures" which in retrospect seems not to be the case. Were other officers in the embassy concerned about this peculiar mix of communists and non-communists in the Czech government?

PELL: I really don't recall, it was more than forty years ago.

Q: Were you having to deal with the Sudeten Deutsche or Czechs who where coming into your office for visas?

PELL: These were mostly Czechs.

Q: Did you get to travel much when you were stationed in Prague?

PELL: Yes a great deal. We would go out each weekend in our car and get as much traveling in as we could.

Q: Was it your impression that the Czechs were leaning towards the Russians until things got difficult?

PELL: No. You know the Czechs wanted to join the Marshall Plan and the IBRD.

Q: I know they were forced to reject the Marshall plan because of Soviet pressure.

PELL: But they definitely leaned towards the west.

Q: You were assigned to Bratislava to open the consulate general, why were we interested in opening a post there?

PELL: Actually I had resigned from the Foreign Service at that time, but then when the opportunity to have my own post came, I requested the Department [of State] to withdraw their acceptance of my resignation which they were nice enough to do. My dear friend and supporter and a man I literally worshiped, Charles Yost was at that time Counselor of the embassy helped me with this. I was stimulated by the thought of having my own post, it was a real challenge.

Q: Why did you think about resigning at that point?

PELL: Well I had my own economic independence. I had lots of ideas of what I wanted to do. I thought of publishing my own newspaper or maybe publishing a magazine or teaching. I really wanted more freedom to move around in my own country than I would have in the Foreign Service.

Q: Why were we interested in opening a post is Bratislava?

PELL: Because we have many Americans of Slovak extraction, I think more Americans are of Slovak extraction than of Czech extraction, it was a very important political listening post for eastern Europe and an important historic city which was called in various languages Pozsony, Pressburg, and Bratislava, respectively in Hungarian, German and Slovak.

Q: I notice that Ambassador Steinhardt was sending cables back to Washington complaining that we did not have a post in Bratislava, and saying that the Russians, British and French did have posts there. Were you given much support when you went to Bratislava or were you pretty much on your own when you went to open up this post?

PELL: I was given whatever support that seemed proper. We had to live in a hotel when we were getting it going. Eventually our Government had a good building, which we still own. I had sort of my own USIS operation on the ground [floor] with magazines and books, and then offices on the next two floors. My wife and I rented a house not too far away.

Q: What was the major work you were doing in Bratislava?

PELL: The major work there was political reporting.

Q: What was the situation there? I go back to the official record, Ambassador Steinhardt was saying that Slovakia was the most ripe area in Czechoslovakia for a Soviet style coup.

PELL: The Slovaks were very independent; they were very conservative, very religious and for the Communists to get anywhere there they would have to do it by force, by <u>putsch</u> not by popular election.

Q: Things were moving towards an election in the spring of 1948 there was this putsch in February 1948.

PELL: As I explained the election was coming which would have had the Communists doing much worse than they had and the Communists and Russians could not permit that to occur and they had to intervene to make sure they had control of Czechoslovakia.

Q: You were reporting your observations of this phenomenon from Bratislava, but this was not being included in the reports from the embassy as far as you know?

PELL: As far as I know.

Q: After the Czech Communists took over were you and your staff in Bratislava put under particular pressure at that time by the authorities, the police?

PELL: Not particularly. Of course I was followed wherever I went driving. I used to go walking or running and they would keep tabs on us, following me. They did arrest a couple of my people, one man who was working for me as an interpreter was terribly beaten up and abused and then a couple who had worked for me were arrested and maltreated - very badly treated. One man who had driven for me, was reported to me as having been beaten to death. So it was a grim business when the Communists took over, about half my staff was either put in jail or fled.

Q: These were all Czech citizens?

PELL: Yes, John Hvasta was a dual citizen.

Q: One final question Senator. You were in Czechoslovakia at climatic time of East-West relations, it was perhaps the pivotal point. A democratic government was taken over from within by the Communists and you were there at the beginning and end of this act that took a year or more to happen. Has this had any effect on you now that have been involved in foreign affairs, East-West relations for so many years? Is this experience something that you have taken with you in your other role as Senator?

PELL: Yes, it has sensitized me to the dangers of Communism. It has also impressed upon me the poor and unsuccessful system that Communism is. It goes against human nature, the very natural desire to acquire a little property for your children, to worship freely, to travel freely to engage in politics freely, to express your opinions freely. These are all human tendencies no matter where you are. When you live behind the Iron Curtain for a little bit you really get a very strong impression of how much one dislikes their system of Communism. I know when I went over there I was rather conscious of some of its theoretical features about which we were taught in the colleges of America at the time of the late Thirties. But then, when you were exposed to it, you realized that it really was a pretty dreadful system. Moreover, the present Communists go back to the past's Bolsheviks and really are willing to seize and to carry out any opportunity.

KENNETH N. SKOUG
Economic Counselor
Moscow, USSR (1976-1979)

Kenneth N. Skoug was born in North Dakota in 1931. He attended both Columbia College and George Washington University. His career included positions in Germany, Mexico, Prague, Moscow, and Venezuela. Mr. Skoug was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 2000.

Q: How did things develop?

SKOUG: Well, Dubcek came to power. The Party published his life history, which we began to study. He had grown up in the Soviet Union, had been taken there as a small boy. He spoke Russian fluently. He'd only come back to Slovakia at the time just before the Second World War because the Soviets insisted that those exiled Communists like his father and mother must either become Soviet citizens or leave. And they chose to leave rather than become Soviet citizens. That's how Dubcek got back to Slovakia. He took part in the Slovak uprising against the Germans in 1944. His brother was killed in the fighting. He had the record of a lifelong Communist, the son of lifelong Communists, who had trained in the Soviet Union and ostensibly the Russians should have been very, very happy indeed. But really, they weren't so happy because they knew he had been there at the time of Khrushchev, associated with a lot of Russian critics. Khrushchev in domestic politics was something of a reformer, and Dubcek shared that spirit, and he later wrote that although he and Milos Jakes and others – I think possibly Lenart – were all in the Soviet Union at the same time studying there, "We may have read the same books, but we didn't come back with the same ideas." He later maintained that he came back with a more tolerant idea, and really the record bears him out, because in the fight for rehabilitation of former political prisoners, Dubcek was on the side of rehabilitation; Novotny was on the other side. Dubcek, as he became head of the party in Slovakia, permitted the Slovak Writers Union much greater freedom than the Czech Writers Union had, particularly after the crackdown. Literarni Noviny, which was the organ of the Czech writers, was placed under the Ministry of the Interior by Novotny in 1967, after which time no one would write for it. And they all began to publish from Slovakia, where Dubcek was. So it could be inferred that Dubcek was not a hardliner - he was very pro-Russian and he maintained that outlook until his death. He always thought the August 1968 intervention was a tragic mistake. He liked the Soviet Union. If only the Soviet Union had been able to understand that he was trying to make communism popular again, whereas Novotny had abused it. If you really opened the windows, people would rally to the cause. And that's what Dubcek, in his naïveté, believed, and he believed that he ought to be able to convince the Russians. There are sort of two theses about the first months of Dubcek, and of course Dubcek did not have a long time in power, but he did have until the invasion about seven and a half months. During the first two months it was thought or sometimes said that the other Communist countries gave him a honeymoon, and the Czechoslovak population didn't see much difference between him and Novotny. I can assure you that neither of those are right, because almost immediately it was clear to any observer on the scene that there was a brand-new spirit in the country. A television program would appear without "Party spirit," without an ideological content. There was a documentary on the three houses which the Peceks prominent

Czechoslovak coal barons had built in the 1930s. The television reporter simply pointed out that one of them was occupied by the American ambassador. Here's the American ambassador living in this Petschek house. The Soviet embassy is in another one, and the Chinese embassy was in the third one. And they didn't say "boo" about the exploiters being in one and the... It was just a documentary. Well, if somebody who didn't know communism had seen that, he would have said, "Well, it's like what you see on television." But you didn't see that on television in Communist countries or in the Novotny period. So very quickly there were real changes.

ROBERT WILLIAM FARRAND
Deputy Chief of Mission
Prague, Czechoslovakia (1983-1985)

Mr. Farrand was born in Watertown, New York in 1934 and graduated from Mount Saint Mary's College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. He served in numerous posts including Kuala Lumpur, Moscow and Prague and was named ambassador to Papua, New Guinea in 1990. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: How about contacts? Did you have any contacts with commercial or manufacturing people or anything like that?

FARRAND: Well, the Soviet system divided the countries of Eastern Europe into various categories under this arrangement known as commicon or CMEA, Counsel of Mutual Economic Assistance. We called it commicon. Long before I ever got there and long before our embassy was robust enough to have any influence, not that it would have, so I should strike that comment. The Soviets decided that certain parts of their eastern, well it would be their Western Empire, the six countries of Eastern Europe, what we call it, would do various things for the Soviet industrial machine. They would produce certain things and the Soviets divvied it out that way. For example, there were three parts of Czechoslovakia. There's Bohemia, in the west of which Prague is the center, there's Moravia in the center of which the city Brno is the most important town and then there is Slovakia in which Bratislava is the important city. Now, historically, Bohemia is inhabited by Czech peoples and as a just as a rough thumb, populist rule of thumb; the Czech peoples drink beer and are industrialized. As you go further east and get into Slovakia you come onto people who are agricultural and drink wine. Now, those are simple little differences, but they were used as a kind of a shorthand way of defining. Into Slovakia the Soviets gave the obligation to produce to build a huge steel mill in the far, far eastern reaches of Slovakia right up chock a block up against the Ukraine and to build a lot of steel for heavy application. For example, tank, tank turrets, engines, not so much the engines, but the housings for the engines of trains and things of this nature. This was something that these people had no experience in, they had no iron ore and the Soviets would ship the iron ore to them and then they would struggle to make this huge, massive, inefficient, behemoth of a plant work. It was that sort of thing that happened. The Czechs were to produce over in Bohemia all of the streetcars, the trolley cars that were used throughout that part of Europe. They were to produce the engines for trains and Czech engines, there was an outfit called Czechkaday who produced these huge massive engines and

they became the engines that drove a lot of trains through the commicon countries. Czech streetcars would be on the streets of Poland and streets of Warsaw and places like that. Kiev. But, all of this was without the law of comparative advantage being applied and without any competition. So, they just kept slagging backwards. They wouldn't come up with new innovative things. We could have helped there, but the Soviets of course; it was a political thing.

Q: *What was your take on the relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks at that point?*

FARRAND: That situation I feel particularly badly how it has all come out, but Czechoslovakia, if I have my history right, was essentially broken and put back together after the First World War at a conference held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Largely brokered by Woodrow Wilson or at least he had a role in it. The Czechs made up roughly two-thirds of Czechoslovakia, with the Slovaks one-third. This may have contributed to the problem. The Slovaks were more deeply indebted in the Slavic world, that is being further to the east. The Czech Republic as it is today or back then, Czechoslovakia, the Czech part of it, Bohemia and Moravia were like a thumb sticking into what I guess you would call traditional Western Europe. That gave them an outlook possibly that, possibly the fact that they had had Charles University since 1348. They had had a great relationship under the Holy Roman Empire. Some of their kings were related to kings from Western Europe, principally France. So, that they had a Western outlook, perhaps the Slovaks had a more Eastern outlook. I don't know. I do know this, that there was a problem all along and, I guess it comes down to use pop psychology to one of kind of a superiority inferiority relationship.

Q: Well, I'm trying to get at how you saw it at the time, members of the embassy. Was it something that you thought was significant or was it just?

FARRAND: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, it was, there was I think it wasn't spoken about a lot because it didn't look like there was going to be a real movement to divide, but if you had asked any of them, the ambassadors under whom I worked, deputy chiefs of mission, there would have been unanimity, that in unity the Czech and the Slovak peoples had a better chance in the world. They were landlocked after all; they had no outlet to the sea, north, south, east or west. The Danube River came through on the southern border for part of it with Austria, but really the Czechs had to rely and the Slovaks had to rely on highways and secondary, really secondary rivers for their goods. So, there would have been no difference of opinion within the embassy that this union should stay together particularly because it was brokered by the United States, but there was in the United States a very strong Slovak American movement. There was a congress, maybe still is a Slovak American congress unless I remember it was focused in Pittsburgh, could be wrong. In any case, these people were constantly pushing to have a hyphen; they were pushing for a hyphen. They wanted Czecho-Slovakia. They could not stand Czechoslovakia because it gave the Czechs the capital C and they didn't get a capital S. Stuff like this and it was.

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Q: Where did you go?

FARRAND: But, before we leave, you had another part to your, you had three things you wanted to talk about with the Czechs. You had the dissidents, you had the Slovaks and the Helsinki Accord. If I might say just before we leave the Slovak thing, that I followed that and after in the early 1990s, the Slovaks split and became a country, Slovakia. I remember hearing that where I was, I guess I was out in the South Pacific and I just shook my head and continue to shake my head. It just seems to me that the Slovaks in doing what they've done is to shoot themselves directly in the foot.

Q: When you look at it, it was really not even put to a vote, it was a political thing.

FARRAND: No, Mecchear pushing it then and it was given support by this congress back here, of course. Now, here they are even more isolated, even less supported and the Czechs would and Hovell, Hovell would have resisted, I don't know about Klauss, but Hovell was resisting and he would have. It is probably true that the Czechs in their internal conversations looked down on the Slovaks and the Slovaks feel this, but that is not a reason to break up a country. In the intermarriage rate was something in the rate of, I don't know, it had to be a significant number in the double figures.

JULIAN M. NIEMCZYK
Air Attaché
Prague (1967-1969)

Julian M. Niemczyk was born in 1920 in Oklahoma, the son of an Army officer. He went to Oklahoma University and then went into the Army during World War II, eventually being assigned to the OSS serving in Burma and China. He remained in the Air Force and served in Japan and the Philippines and eventually Warsaw as an air attaché. He was Defense Attaché in Prague during the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Becoming active in political life he was appointed as ambassador to Czechoslovakia in 1986. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

NIEMCZYK: So we heard this heavy armada of aircraft which went into the International Airfield which was closed down, bringing in soldiers, paratroopers. Tanks started rolling in after midnight and they arrived in Prague at 5 in the morning from East Germany and Poland. They were in Bratislava at midnight and we were having phone calls to our Embassy from Slovaks in Bratislava. We had a consulate, but it was closed. I was instrumental in getting it open twenty years later.

Q: Senator Pell opened the place as a young vice consul.

NIEMCZYK: So we had these calls from Bratislava saying that Soviet and Hungarian forces had crossed the river in Bratislava and were heading wherever. So early next morning, we went to the Embassy and spent a lot of the night there. I went to my home the next day. My home as Defense Attaché was on a street called Na Zatorce and at the end of the street was the Soviet Embassy

compound, which was huge. About a block up the street was the residence of the Soviet Ambassador. When I got home in the morning, the Soviet Ambassador's residence had been surrounded by tanks. My little quiet street of Na Zatorce had tanks and armored cars backed up over the curb tearing up the sidewalk. My driveway was closed connecting a circle around the Soviet Embassy. So it was quite a fortification there with my place being right in the middle.

THEODORE E. RUSSELL
Ambassador
Slovakia (1993-1996)

Ambassador Russell was born in India of American parents and raised in the US and Italy. He was educated at Harvard University and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Joining the Foreign Service in 1963, the ambassador served primarily at European posts, including Naples, Trieste, Rome, Copenhagen (DCM), and Prague, where he served two tours. His Washington assignments also concerned primarily European matters. In 1993 he was named Ambassador to Slovakia, where he served until 1996. He later served as Deputy Commander for Political Affairs at the US Army War College. Ambassador Russell was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Did you get any feel, we will touch on it. As you went out in this first time, did you get any feel for the Czechs versus the Slovaks and that or were you pretty much in a Czech bastion.

RUSSELL: It was a Czech bastion but what we saw was that a lot of the reforms under a Slovak, Dubcek, had to do not only with liberalization, censorship rules, and of course the economic liberalization that set a lot of this off, but also with giving more autonomy to Slovakia. In fact that was the only thing that survived for awhile after the invasion. All the other reforms were rolled back. The greater degree of autonomy for Slovakia was an integral part of this whole thing and was what made the Slovaks enthusiastic about the Prague Spring. They were getting a bit more autonomy and that survived the initial crackdown after Dubcek was ousted.

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Q: So you were there a good hunk of time. Can you talk about your impressions about how the Czechs adjusted to this?

RUSSELL: There was a lot of euphoria, of course, during the Prague Spring, which after the invasion gave way to fear that they were going to lose all of the progress that they had made. However, the crackdown was not immediate, so there was some initial hope that some of these reforms would survive. Immediately after the invasion, for example, there was a secret session of reformist members of the Communist Party in a Prague factory where they continued to pass reformist resolutions. So the crackdown did not come immediately, and people were initially hopeful. However, little by little, toward the end of the year, they started to remove reformists from their positions. There were signs that a lot of reforms were going to be rolled back. The

press was silenced pretty quickly. Everything pointed to things deteriorating. That's why early in the New Year in '69 you had the student, Jan Palach, burn himself to death. He doused himself with gasoline or kerosene in Wenceslas Square and burned himself to death in protest to what was clearly becoming a crackdown and a rollback of the various reforms. Then people started to really understand how bad things were going to get. But the real crackdown didn't come until later. The end of March of '69 you had a Czechoslovak-Soviet hockey match which everyone in the country was watching. It was a highly political development. The Czechoslovak team won 4-3, and people just went nuts, driving all around town beeping their horns and yelling and dancing and generally celebrating. Probably, the secret police took advantage of this and perhaps even prepositioned loose cobblestones next to the Aeroflot offices in Wenceslas Square, and lo and behold, the rocks were thrown through the window of the Aeroflot office, and the office sacked by demonstrators. The Soviets reacted sharply. By mid April a Slovak hard liner, Gustav Husak, had replaced Dubcek as Party Secretary. Then the crackdown started in earnest. So Husak came in, and then they rolled back virtually all of the political reforms with the exception of some of the changes that had given Slovakia a bit more autonomy. That was not initially rolled back but gradually made moot by the fact that it was emptied of content. Prague was continuing to dictate and the dictator was Gustav Husak, a Slovak but a willing ally of the Soviets in the crack down.

Q: Was there any reason why Slovaks were in that? Was that a deliberate move in the Communist Party to push Slovaks to be the head of the party? I mean Dubcek was Slovak.

RUSSELL: Dubcek was Slovak and part of the impetus driving the Dubcek-led reform movement was that Antonin Novotny, who was head of the Communist Party and was a Czech, was an anti-Slovak Czech. He was also an extremely unpleasant fellow. The Slovaks hated his guts, so part of what mobilized Slovaks to join this reform movement was the feeling that they had to get rid of Antonin Novotny. Part of what the Slovaks wanted out of this was more autonomy. The Czechs were interested more in the political and economic reforms, building on the ideas of economists like Ota Sik in the early '60s. Husak was brought in because he was the tough guy. The Russians trusted him. He had been locked up in the period of the purges and actually tortured, but he was a dyed in the wool Communist, a real hard line guy. He was brought in and simply conducted what was then a major purge of the Communist Party. While the general populace was very enthusiastic about the Prague Spring reforms, the ones by definition who are able to drive things were party members who held all the positions of power. So when the crackdown came, Husak and the Soviets said, "We have got to purge this party. This party is sick." So the purge was to get rid of reform Communists. In the Embassy in the last year I was Political Officer and we were trying very hard to keep track of the intensity and breadth of this purge. We were able to do it to a certain extent, and it was very broad. Anyone who did not recant, say they had made a mistake supporting the Prague Spring, say the invasion was justified, sign something to this effect, in other words anyone who had any kind of principles at all and was not willing to sell out totally, was purged, and sent to work as a window washer or furnace stoker and that kind of menial job away from contact with the public.

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Q: The issue became very important to you later on, but were you seeing any fissures between the Czechs and the Slovaks at that time?

RUSSELL: Not a lot. We were seeing some reports even at that early date that some of the Communist officials were favoring more Slovak autonomy on the grounds that the Czech approach was going to be tougher on them than what they might experience in a more autonomous Slovakia. We had a few scattered reports coming in saying these guys thought they would be better off if they could get further away from the reach of Prague. However, these were really straws in the wind. What we did see is that the Slovaks not surprisingly wanted to get greater autonomy now that they were free of the Communist control. They wanted to go back to what they were trying to get in 1968. Part of the deal in '68 was democracy. Part of it was more autonomy for Slovakia that Dubcek was particularly pushing. So they wanted to follow up on that and get much greater autonomy, but not necessarily independence. We saw that as a possible area for friction, but it was not clear to us that they were going to split.

Q: Was the dissident movement pretty much a Czech movement?

RUSSELL: The dissident movement in the sense of charter '77 signatories and people who were involved in starting the '89 revolution was a predominately Czech movement. The Slovak dissidents were more associated with the underground church which kept going in Slovakia. The Communist security apparatus, the StB, actually had intelligence agents infiltrated into the church itself. The underground church was something else. The underground church and some of the environmental movements were more prominent in the dissident movement in Slovakia, whereas in the Czech lands it was more the intellectuals associated with the Charter '77 movement. In Slovakia in general, the Communists had not been perceived as ruling with such a heavy hand. Slovak industrialization occurred under Communism. Czech industrialization occurred more under Austria-Hungary. I remember being driven around by a Slovak regional Communist Party secretary when I went to lay a wreath on a monument to a U.S. OSS mission that was captured in Slovakia during the war. The Communist Mayor was pleased to have us come and make that kind of a gesture. He would support that, as long as there was no public ceremony. So I remember this regional party secretary drove me around in his big black Tatra limousine, and kept commenting "see that car, see that nice little house? We have given the people these benefits. We brought industry to Slovakia. We are responsible and that's why we are popular." I don't believe they were very popular, but Communism was perceived by many as less onerous in Slovakia. There were a lot of capital flows from the Czech part to the Slovak part of the country under Communism. So while there were a number of courageous dissidents like Jan Carnogursky in Slovakia, opposition wasn't as pronounced as in the Czech Lands.

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Q: Well, then you left there in '93. What happened?

RUSSELL: I left there in mid summer 1993. My name was proposed by State to the White House to be Ambassador to Slovakia. So I was working at EPA and then the announcement was made in July or early August that I had been nominated. So State suggested terminating my detail to EPA and starting to consult and get ready for my Senate confirmation hearing and onward assignment.

My name was sent over by the Department to the White House I think in February of '93. What I was hearing was there was some thought the White House might want to send a political Ambassador instead.

Q: I assume a political of Slovakian ancestry.

RUSSELL: Yes, with some Slovak tie. I knew of at least one political nominee who was interested in it, a rather high ranking and respected staff person from the Congress. So that went on for awhile. Finally the White House announced me, I think in July or early August. Then I was able to start to get ready, but as you know the Congressional Affairs Bureau is very careful about what you do before you are actually confirmed, so my preparation to go to Slovakia was mainly limited to the Department and other foreign affairs agencies. I was not supposed to run around and talk to American businesses and that sort of thing outside the Executive Branch.

So I was announced in mid summer and started to read in on the situation. I would go around and talk to people in the Department. I knew something about Bratislava because I had been in Prague when we first reopened the Consulate in Bratislava in 1990. Of course Slovakia became independent January 1, 1993, so our little consulate there became an embassy. I started going around the Department trying to find out exactly where we stood. That was a rude awakening, because actually we had done almost nothing there. We had a skeleton staff. We had not really done anything on the administrative side. We didn't have a regular admin officer there for the first seven months or so of the existence of the Embassy. They would have TDY people come in. The Department basically did nothing to get Slovakia spun up from an administrative point of view. You had AID going in gradually building up a mission and getting good office space and nice housing for the staff. They were well ensconced by the time I started reading in. USIA had an officer out there as well. She had enough funds to set up a decent office and get a nice apartment. But still the Department had done almost nothing by way of administrative support for its own staff and basic Embassy functions like communications and security.

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Q: Were you the first Ambassador?

RUSSELL: I was the first Ambassador. Bratislava was set up as a consulate in 1991 and this tiny consular operation suddenly became an embassy. AID and USIA got their acts together relatively fast, State did not. So you were asking what did I do when I was reading in. What I spent most of my time doing was going pillar to post within the State Department and the Washington bureaucracy trying to get people focused on the serious administrative problems at post involving lack of adequate U.S. or trained FSN administrative support, lack of classified telegraphic or telephone facilities, lack of adequate housing, lack of Embassy and Residence security and myriad other resource problems. We had only one American staffer on the administrative side. I was hearing in Washington, and this was confirmed after my arrival, that the individual was not up to what was admittedly a daunting task. An officer, who became my Deputy, was sent out in mid 1993 to replace Paul Hacker as Chargé until I was confirmed. Paul had done good work as Consul in Bratislava prior to the split and then held the fort pending nomination of an Ambassador. My future Deputy, sent out as Charge, worked hard to improve

the very unsatisfactory administrative situation and to get up to speed on the dicey political situation.

Q: Who was that?

RUSSELL: Eleanor Sutter, a very bright and energetic officer. I said, "Look, Ellie, why not get together with admin and send in a cable describing what you are facing out there so we will have something on the record." All I was seeing were records of telephone calls saying nothing is working. So we got the most pitiable message in. It was as if someone had typed it on an old fashioned typewriter and it had come over the airwaves in this kind of scrambled, garbled form, this pitiable lament about how nothing worked, there wasn't enough money, everyone was upset and morale was low. Things were a total mess from an administrative point of view. So armed with this document, I went around to the administrative folks and said, "Look, we really have got to do something about this." EUR/EX was obviously interested in seeing that this post worked. Many working level people in the Department were helpful, but there simply wasn't any money being allocated and additional staff was not being approved. When I had a chance to meet Secretary Christopher briefly for a photo op at a group lunch for outgoing Ambassadors, he asked "how are things in Bratislava" I said "other than lack of staff, housing and communications, fine." His answer was "good luck." So what I finally did was approach another agency on the communications issue. At that point there were expressions of horror from the folks at State who had maintained there was no money for classified communications for Bratislava. Suddenly, communications money became available, and we received enough to set up a little khaki colored tent in the attic in which our communicator could sit and actually type one classified telegram at a time on a little box. I had to fight like hell to get that. Then I got a little bit more money for a few more FSN positions. We had very few FSNs, and they weren't trained. A lot of them didn't know what they were supposed to be doing. They didn't actually have anyone to train them. And then I talked with people about how we could coordinate better with Vienna. The people in Vienna under Ambassador Hunt were really great, and they were our support for many services. Anyway, to make a long story short, I spent most of my time trying to get more admin. support. EUR/EX finally, reluctantly because they were hard pressed, said, "Okay, we will try to get you a GSO sometime next year," and they did. Really that was the single most important thing because we got a superb GSO, David Newell, who came out in late spring of 1994. Anyway, I got out there after I was sworn in in December. It had been a particularly long process from when I was announced in mid summer, to when I went out in December because we had some controversial people in my group of Ambassadors up for confirmation by the Senate. One of them was the ill famed Larry Lawrence. I remember Ambassador Dennis Kux on behalf of AFSA, blasting Lawrence's appointment in appropriately strong language.

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Q: Who was the president?

RUSSELL: President Kovac. He was very friendly from the start. It was an interesting dynamic because he didn't get along with Prime Minister Meciar. In fact, they came to hate each other. Meciar was a strong authoritarian type who was for the second time Prime Minister of Slovakia when I first arrived. I got to see Meciar very quickly and had a long and cordial initial

conversation. I had been warned about him by briefers in Washington. He was very manipulative and I was briefed that he used various techniques to throw you off balance when you were talking to him. He had been a boxer at one point in his life. Supposedly, he would stare at you just above your nose as he was speaking. That was supposed to be disconcerting. I don't know whether that would be disconcerting or not, but he didn't do it with me, and we actually had a good conversation.

At one point I said "We want a good relationship with Slovakia. We want to help you. Your government has asked for our support in a number of different areas in moving forward to establish a working free market and democracy. How do you see our relationship?" He answered, "Well, you won the cold war. It looks like we should be with you." That was his succinct reading of the international situation. No ideas about "democracy vs. totalitarianism." At another point, we were talking about political philosophy. I said, "One American president I have always admired a lot was Teddy Roosevelt. He had this philosophy of 'speak softly but carry a big stick'." By the way, Stu, I still think this should be America's foreign policy in a nutshell. Meciar responded, "That sounds pretty good, but really the Romans understood politics the best. You remember the Romans said 'Divide et Impera'. That is really what it is all about." That encapsulated Meciar's approach to everything. That was a clear statement of how he maneuvered during his political career by pitting competitors against each other, creating a constant atmosphere of tension.

Q: When you went out there and you weren't doing the administrative side, what was the reading you were getting from your colleagues in the Department about why Czechoslovakia had broken into these two parts, and how did we feel, we or the United States government feel about it?

RUSSELL: I had gotten that reading back when I was in Prague and had followed Czechoslovak events since that time. We knew for certain that Slovakia was going to demand more autonomy as soon as they got the chance. It was predictable and not a bad thing. I guess in the summer of 1992 I started talking to Personnel and said, "I want to be considered for Ambassador to Slovakia." They said, "There isn't a Slovakia." I replied "Yes, but there will be." It was clear to me already by then that things were moving in a direction where there might very well be a Slovakia, because I knew from having dealt with him in Prague that Vaclav Klaus, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister from July 1992, was not going to do anything that would compromise the Czech part of the economy and his planned reforms. He would make any deal with Meciar, who was the Slovak Prime Minister, short of one that would compromise the economy. What Meciar essentially wanted was a loose federation, not a split. He was not demanding an independent Slovakia. He wanted everything short of that because among other things there were substantial economic benefits to remaining linked to the more prosperous Bohemia and Moravia. Meciar simply demanded more than Klaus was willing to give. I think Meciar was surprised when Klaus refused and felt he had been pushed into a definitive split rather than having chosen it himself. But Meciar then accepted the split and took great pride in characterizing himself as the father of Slovak independence. I remember Havel was extremely upset by this notion of splitting and was very much against it. But Klaus and Meciar declined to hold a national referendum on it. Polls showed that a large majority of Czechs and Slovaks would have voted against splitting at that point.

I was convinced well before the split that this was going to happen. The way the U.S. looked on it was that it was not good for the Slovak economy in particular. The feeling was that this was not a good thing for either side because they were only a country of fifteen million splitting into ten and five. Slovakia had a large Hungarian minority population and a weaker economy and the situation in the Ukraine made it a risky neighborhood. On the other hand, it was not our call. Our position was "Do it democratically and peacefully and good luck." After the split, we immediately recognized them both and asked "What can we do to help?"

Q: How did you find by the time you got out there, you know taking on being a nation. How was that taking hold?

RUSSELL: I think that once they split, gradually you had a growing majority accepting the notion of Slovak independence and supporting it. Many Slovaks felt that the Czechs had always treated them like little brother. There is certainly a big majority which wouldn't want to go back but would rather be independent.

Q: Were things kind of working?

RUSSELL: No, not really. The Slovak economy took a bigger hit after the collapse of the Soviet Union, because they depended a lot on their heavy military industry. They had a lot of tank and APC factories in Slovakia and produced more than half of Communist Czechoslovakia's huge output of military equipment, most of it sold to the Middle East and South Asia. Czechoslovakia was one of the top ten arms producers in the world. These heavy defense industries were mainly in eastern Slovakia where the Soviets wanted them so they were further behind the lines. Some had been moved there before World War II. They were doing very well under Communism.

As I mentioned to you talking about my service in Prague, the fact of the matter is the Slovaks had industrialized under Communism. The Czechs had industrialized under Austria Hungary. The Slovaks got a chicken in every pot and a car in most garages mainly under Communism. Some of them actually got that under the Slovak Clero-Fascist state during WW II when they did fairly well as kind of a granary for the Reich, until the Slovak national uprising in 1944. So you had a situation where the loss of the Soviet market for Czechoslovak exports with the collapse of the Soviet Union in '91 really hit the Slovak economy very hard. Also, the heavy arms industry, which had already started to decline in the 1980s, was gradually squeezed down in Slovakia as they lost their traditional customers and state subsidies. So their economy was not doing well. The GDP dropped and unemployment rose. This was true of most of the former Soviet bloc countries in the area after the fall of Communism. Inflation was high, around 24-25% at one point. The hope was that they could attract foreign business and they could privatize and this would make things move forward. Indeed the Slovak economy by about '94 started to turn around to some extent. They had a very smart economist at the head of the central bank, a brilliant guy, who I think, helped them with their international credibility, and helped start the economy back. Actually Slovak economic statistics during 1994-'96 were pretty good. Slovaks, particularly the younger generation, are very entrepreneurial and Slovakia is strategically located in terms of exports. However, they didn't get much foreign investment under Meciar. He scared a lot of foreign investors away and privatized a lot of state properties to his cronies who ran them into the ground.

Q: I was looking at the map and you have got the Ukraine which essentially you had while it was part of the Soviet Union had grabbed a bit of Czechoslovakia.

RUSSELL: The Soviet Union had grabbed a corridor. They wanted to connect with Czechoslovakia so they would have a corridor, and they just seized Trans-Carpathian Ukraine.

Q: Well, Ukraine was going and still is going through a lot of bad times economically. How did that impact on Slovakia?

RUSSELL: Not a lot. The loss of the Soviet Union market, which would include the Ukraine, hurt Slovakia. But like the other countries in the area, they gradually reoriented their trade and fairly quickly most of it was going to the West, the EU, particularly to Germany and to Austria and the Czech Republic. Those are still their biggest trading partners.

Q: We are still on the economic side. What did these tank factories turn into or do?

RUSSELL: Well they went from about 90% capacity or more down to about 10% capacity, and a lot of people were laid off. When I was there, there was still a concern about Slovak shipments of heavy weapons if not to pariah countries, then to countries that we didn't want them to ship to like Syria. So they were still making some of them, but it was a much lower production rate.

Q: Well, were they finding other things to produce?

RUSSELL: Yes, but they weren't doing particularly well at it. They were making some low end electronics. They had some agricultural exports. I mean they weren't doing an awful lot. They were doing fairly well on some of the foreign investments that had come in. Volkswagen set up a very successful plant in Bratislava, so they were exporting cars from that. Whirlpool had a very successful plant up north. They had some machinery exports, electronics exports, that kind of thing, but it wasn't a very prosperous economy.

Q: How about agriculture?

RUSSELL: Agriculture had once been the backbone of the Slovak economy, but by the time the Soviet influence was removed, agriculture wasn't a big factor.

Q: Well, then did the Czechs do much about Slovakia? Was there still much connection between the two?

RUSSELL: That is a very good question because the answer is that at first people were shocked by the split. A lot of Slovaks were married to Czechs. So there was initial shock, and then there was a funny reaction. It was almost as if the Czechs reacted by saying "Well okay, they wanted that, to heck with it, because they caused this split and they were the ones who benefited most economically from being with us. If that is what they really want, let them have it." There was some of that kind of bitterness in the initial Czech reaction. The Slovak reaction became "That's too bad. We don't dislike the Czechs, but we are glad to have our independence; now let's see

what we can do." There were mixed reactions to it. However, the Visegrad countries, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, are now working very closely together to help each other get into the EU and to help Slovakia get into NATO because Slovakia leaves a big geographic hole in the area. This has brought the Czechs and Slovaks back closer together. They have settled virtually all of their outstanding problems stemming from the split. There was the problem of how to divide the national wealth. There was the question of Slovak gold being held by the Czechs and how much they should pay to get it back and small border adjustments that under Meciar couldn't get solved because he always took such a tough approach to things. Now these transition problems have virtually all been solved and the relationship is fast improving. That's where it is right now. (Note: the Czech Republic had already joined NATO in March 1999, while Slovakia, held back by the Meciar period, did not enter until March 2004. Both joined the EU in May 2004. Relations between them are excellent, the Slovak economy is doing well and foreign investment has greatly increased since the Dzurinda government came into office in 1998.)

Q: How did you find the government there? I mean what sort of role were we playing with the government that was there when you were there?

RUSSELL: It was very interesting. We recognized Slovakia immediately when they became independent. The basis was they declared "We want to become a democratic country with an open market economy and we'd like your help in moving in this direction." That was the stated basis of the relationship when I arrived. Meciar's natural predilection was to look more towards Eastern ways of doing business economically and politically. He was gradually realizing that Slovakia's future lay in the West, but he didn't trust the West to accept the way he wanted to run Slovakia and to accept him personally. He basically wanted to have Western acceptance without giving up his autocratic ways. He also appeared anxious to play a bridging role between the U.S. and EU and Russia.

We didn't trust Meciar, but we were willing to work with him and judge him by his actions. Basically what I was instructed to say was "We want to work with you; we want Slovakia to succeed; we want a good relationship, but that will depend on your policies. If you are moving in a democratic, free market kind of way, we will totally support that. If you are not, we won't. But we want a good relationship and we want Slovakia to succeed in joining Euro-Atlantic institutions which is your government's stated goal." So we had a cautious relationship. The problem was you couldn't trust Meciar. He dominated the government. He had the charisma and force of will and the intelligence to succeed. He was a good political tactician, but could not escape his desire to control others and his propensity for confrontation.

Our job was to persuade Meciar that it was in his interest to maintain good relations with the U.S. and other Western countries by not pushing the envelope on authoritarian solutions. Yet you couldn't trust him to do that, even if he said he would. For example, in our first meeting he said U.S. Slovak relations were great and there were no bilateral problems in his view. Then within a week or two we learned he was getting ready to break the contract which allowed Radio Free Europe to operate in Slovakia. I went to him late one Saturday afternoon, as I recall, and said, "Prime Minister, what is this? What is going on? You are meeting President Clinton in a summit in Prague in a few weeks and that is going to sour things if you force Radio Free Europe out of

Slovakia by breaking a legitimate contract." "Oh, no," Meciar said, "We wouldn't do that. I can assure you we will roll that right back. That was a terrible mistake. How could my minister have done that?" Although it seemed likely Meciar himself was behind the decision, I decided to take him at his word and press for its revocation. I therefore called about every third day to his office or the Foreign Ministry to urge the matter be rectified. I had a call the day of the summit where he was to meet with President Clinton in which he again gave assurances the measure would be rolled back. Clinton did not raise the matter and the game went on until I got a letter from the Foreign Minister the day before the contract was due to be revoked saying the government had rescinded the order. Meciar repeatedly showed himself untrustworthy and did not seem to realize that he was creating an increasingly negative impression on the U.S. and Western European countries that would be deciding whether to let Slovakia into NATO and the EU.

Q: Was there a Parliament?

RUSSELL: There was a parliament in which Meciar had really lost the majority. It was a situation where he started out with a majority, and then because of this "divide and conquer" mentality combined with an extremely confrontational way of doing business, he gradually alienated his leading allies. He was a bit like a shark that needs to keep swimming to breathe. He seemed to need constant conflict to function. Because of that he had gradually alienated enough people from his own party that they split and formed another party. He literally created an entire party, former friends of Meciar, whom he hated, and who hated him.

As Meciar gradually alienated people, opposition built in the parliament. He lost his majority, and in mid March 1994, his opponents combined together and voted him out. He knew what was going on. Meciar was an intelligence freak, loved anything to do with intelligence and intrigue. I was seeing him regularly. "Well, Mr. Prime Minister, what is going on?" "Well, they are plotting against me. They are going to throw me out. But I will come back. You watch; you just mark my words," and he would tell me about all these plots some of which I heard about from others. He just loved to show how much he knew. Sure enough, his opponents got together and got him out. But, I kept in touch with Meciar. When he was in power, he was interested in having decent relations with the Embassy. When he was out of power, he really wanted good relations with the Embassy. He and his people would go out of their way to keep up good contacts. Once I went to call on him, he said, "Well, the new government people think they are in power, but I control the civil service so they are going to find out who really is in charge around here."

The new Center Left reformist government under Prime Minister Jozef Moravcik came in with high hopes but didn't have time to accomplish that much. A majority agreed in parliament that, having thrown the Prime Minister out by a Parliamentary no confidence vote, early elections were required in the fall. Well, the Moravcik government made a number of significant reform moves and gained a lot of international good will. However, they were lousy campaigners. They didn't understand the first thing about campaigning, and they had very few charismatic candidates to put forward. Meciar had more charisma in his thumb than some of them had. So he put on a really vigorous campaign, allegedly with electoral advice from Berlusconi's party in Italy, brought some actors and stage personalities into the campaign and promised money to everybody. It was a really rip roaring campaign, and Meciar won.

Government leaders were predicting to me that even if they got a majority, if the majority was based on the participation of the Hungarian Party they would not be able to form a new government. The Hungarian Party during the election campaign was really short sighted because they played the Hungarian ethnic card so vigorously that they alienated supporters of the other pro-government parties. For example, there was one TV ad which showed Slovakia with the band of territory where the majority of Hungarians live in the south along the Hungarian border in Hungarian national colors instead of Slovak red, white and blue. Now if that didn't annoy Slovaks, what would? So I was hearing from the government leaders that there is no way we can work with the Hungarian Party so we are just not going to be able to govern any more.

Meciar came roaring back in. He was really angry and was going to get back at those, including Moravcik, who had defected from his own party, the HZDS, and who had maneuvered the no confidence vote in March that had ousted him. If there is anything that pleases Meciar more than conflict, it's revenge. Parliament, which Meciar now controlled, pushed through a whole series of measures excluding the opposition from key committees, and putting all the opposition leaders on the environment committee and excluding them from any role in oversight of the secret police and privatization decisions. Many people termed this episode the "night of the long knives." Things then went from bad to worse.

In reaction to Meciar's authoritarian moves, the U.S. adopted a very consistent policy. We wanted Slovakia to succeed as a democracy. We had spent trillions of dollars in the Cold War to achieve a free and democratic Central Europe. We therefore said to Meciar "we will judge you by your actions; we will help you in any way we can to move Slovakia towards democracy and a free market economy, but we will not support backsliding, including some recent actions against the opposition." Now, if we had gone to Meciar and said, "Look we don't give a damn what you do domestically. If you want to use the security services to intimidate people, if you want to whack the opposition while they are out of power, be our guest. Just give lots of contracts to American companies and support us in UN votes," he would have happily said "I agree." But that obviously wasn't our policy.

Q: No, it was not our policy. So he was kicked out originally while you were there.

RUSSELL: He was kicked out in March 1994 after being Prime Minister for the second time. He was the Slovak Prime Minister 1990-91 after the velvet revolution in the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (CSFR) as it was known officially after December 1990. He was kicked out for about a year from mid 1991-92 in a Parliamentary "coup" engineered by the Christian Democrats. He came back as Prime Minister for the second time from mid 1992 until March 1994. The reform parties led by Prime Minister Moravcik were in charge from March until Meciar formed a government in mid December 1994. The elections were late September, but then it took a long time to form a government. He finally formed it with the right wing extreme nationalist party and a far left "know nothing" party led by a real dummy who was appointed deputy head of Parliament. I had to pay a courtesy call on this man. He spent most of the time trying to explain to me why barter was the most effective means of international trade. So anyway, Meciar had this awful coalition with the far right and the far left. We sent in a cable after the elections titled "coalition from hell." So Meciar put together this anti-reform coalition

with people that he didn't even like, but who gave him adequate support in parliament to squash the reformist opposition.

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Q: Well, what about the military side? Were the Slovaks doing anything on the military side, or, had whatever forces they had sort of been demobilized?

RUSSELL: They Czechs and Slovaks divided up the military establishment based roughly on a two to one split according to population. It was a lot of work and a little bit rough, but it worked out fairly well. The Slovak military was trying very hard to modernize. After the summit in Prague with President Clinton, where the Partnership for Peace initiative was launched, the Slovaks quickly announced their intention to join. They worked very hard to get all their planning documents in order. They were one of the first ones to join the Partnership for Peace. They became more interested in getting into NATO. Even Meciar insisted Slovakia wanted to get into NATO. What he meant was getting into NATO on his own terms. He didn't want to join any organization that would put curbs on his ability to do pretty much what he wanted domestically. While saying he wanted to enter NATO, he did nothing to advance that. Indeed he sabotaged a May 1997 referendum, which should have been about direct election of the President, by inserting three negatively loaded questions about NATO membership.

Q: Was it a referendum on NATO membership?

RUSSELL: It was supposed to be a referendum, desired by the anti-Meciar opposition parties, on direct election of the President. The opposition was afraid Prime Minister Meciar would accumulate Presidential powers once President Kovac's term was up by delaying the choice of a new President. Meciar's Parliamentary majority pushed through additional referendum questions on whether Slovakia should join NATO. These included loaded questions about locating nuclear weapons and foreign military bases on Slovak soil. Meciar's Interior Minister illegally removed the question of direct election of the President from the ballot and the referendum, in which only about 10% of the electorate participated, was declared invalid. The U.S. and EU both protested Meciar's actions and became more convinced than ever that Slovakia under Meciar should neither get into NATO nor the EU. Throughout this maneuvering the Slovak military played it cool. Their leadership made clear that they were ready and willing for a serious NATO bid once the politicians decided to pursue it.

Q: Of course.

RUSSELL: I had a good relationship with the leadership in the Slovak military, including the Defense Minister and the Chief of the General Staff. It was very clear to me that the Chief of the General Staff was acting in good faith trying to prepare the Slovak military to go into NATO if the politicians decided that is what they really wanted to do. He could not force that decision, but he could try to get the military in better shape for eventual membership. I don't think Meciar's Defense Minister, who was a decent guy, was against going in, but his far right, nationalist party was.

JENONNE WALKER
Ambassador
Czechoslovakia (1995-1998)

Ambassador Walker was born and raised in Oklahoma. After graduating from the University of Oklahoma, she worked in the US Embassy in London before returning to the United States to work with the CIA. She later joined the State Department, initially with the Policy Planning Staff. Subsequently she served as Political Counselor in Stockholm before retuning to Washington, where she held senior positions in the Political-Military Bureau and the Office of European and UN Arms Control. In 1995 she was appointed Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, where she served until 1998. Ambassador Walker was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2004.

Q: Do you want to say something about the region in terms of your involvement in the period you were there? Did you get much involved in issues between Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic? Dayton happened while you were, not too long after you got there in terms of Bosnia were you and the embassy in Prague involved in these things much?

WALKER: No, no. Very, very little. Occasional things would happen. When we needed to send the very first American troops to Bosnia, it was a matter of getting equipment to them by rail. We wanted, of course, we asked the Czechs at the last minute. Tell us in the next thirty minutes we have permission to do this. The Czech constitution says the parliament has to approve any deployment of military force.

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Q: That was true also of the relation—

WALKER: Regional issues.

Q: With the Slovaks.

WALKER: With the Slovaks. There was no need really for me to get involved. The Czech and Slovak velvet divorce was almost complete when I got there. They had done a superb job of dividing up, not just the countries, and it wasn't automatically clear because sometimes there was a town in Slovakia that could only be reached by a road in the Czech Republic or vice versa. So they'd do a bit of land swaps, but dividing up stacks of paper and typewriters and filing cabinets in embassies all over the world. That was mostly done except for a question of some gold reserves that were primarily in the Czech National Bank. Some of that was believed by some of the international Jewish communities to be Jewish gold. So the question of how much of the Jewish gol Slovakia would be responsible for and how much the Czech Republic would be responsible was still an issue. There was no need for us to be engaged in negotiation between the Czechs and the Slovaks on that. Obviously we were very engaged on the issue of Jewish

restitution. Stu Eisenstadt was in the country as our special envoy on that issue. We followed up on it after his departure.

End of reader