

Spreading the word through  
Slovak Studies

Slovak can be easy!

## BUSINESS FOCUS

## SLOVAKS IN THE WORLD

Next week:  
BUSINESS FOCUS  
USATapping the economic  
potential of Slovaks abroadJANA LIPTÁKOVÁ  
Spectator staff

SLOVAKS living abroad can serve as a link between their new homelands and Slovakia. It is estimated that more than 2 million people who claim to be of Slovak descent live abroad. Although this number has not been verified and a large number of the emigrants are employed in their respective countries, there is still potential for the promotion of Slovakia abroad.

The government recently approved a State Policy on Care for Slovaks Living Abroad to 2015, through which The Slovak Economy Ministry is trying to help promote Slovak international connections.

"The cooperation of Slovaks living abroad with a view to utilising their potential benefit for Slovakia represents a significant challenge," the policy reads. "Assuming, of course, that interest from the other side exists."

The aim of the Economy Ministry is to nurture such cooperation via its trade and economic departments at embassies abroad, and the Slovak Agency for Investment and Trade (SARIO) and the Slovak Tourist Board (SACR).

Trade and economic departments already serve as contacts for the provision of assistance to Slovaks living abroad who are involved in Slovak-related commerce, trade and tourism. These departments at Slovak embassies in countries such as the US, Australia, Canada, and Switzerland are traditionally the



Australia is a traditional destination for Slovaks.

Photo: Reuters

most active or report the most interest, Economy Ministry spokesperson Vahram Chuguryan told The Slovak Spectator.

"Trade and economic departments act as consultancy and information points in particular for small and medium-sized companies," said Chuguryan. "In some countries economic attachés monitor the situation of Slovak business persons by meeting with them personally."

As an example of mutual cooperation, he pointed to the preparations for official participation by Slovakia at the technical IFM fair in Malta. There will also be an alternative heating systems exhibition in Ireland this autumn which Slovak businesses in Ireland are due to be involved in.

Chuguryan believes that better export conditions for Slovak products and services could be created through cooperation between the Economy Ministry and Slovaks living abroad through active use of commercial networks as well as that of honorary consuls with Slovak roots.

SARIO believes that cooperation with Slovaks living abroad could contribute to more consistent development of activities abroad.

"SARIO plans to open its own foreign representations in at least five countries in the future," SARIO spokesperson Marián Jánošík told The Slovak Spectator. "In this way it will be able to better establish and monitor contacts with Slovaks in these countries."

Strong community  
in USA

"Since the Slovak community in the USA is relatively large (it is believed to be over 1 million people) and well established across the United States, the Slovak Embassy is aware of the need to work to fully utilise its potential in the economic area, especially in promoting Slovakia as a dynamically developing and successful country attractive for investments as well as in other fields of cooperation," Vít Koziak, second secretary of the Embassy of Slovakia to the US told The Slovak Spectator.

The embassy in Washington, and its trade and economic department in New York and general consulates in New York and Los Angeles show a lot of interest in maintaining connections with American Slovaks. This is done both directly and via honorary consulates since care of the community of expats and assistance to Slovak associations is one of the main tasks of the embassy, according to Koziak.

All of these bodies are, as far as possible, open to every citizen or subject with ideas, proposals or projects related to Slovakia. In the case of expats, a natural inclination to the Slovak environment is a positive advantage, said Koziak.

The Slovak embassy in the United States develops numerous activities to present Slovakia as an economically and investment-attractive country including activities focused on organisations of expats.

See INVEST pg 6

## Slovaks living abroad

BY JANA LIPTÁKOVÁ  
Spectator staff

SLOVAKS do not live only in Slovakia. It is estimated that along with about 5 million Slovaks living in their native country, there are over 2 million people living abroad who claim to be of Slovak origin or to have Slovak roots.

Slovaks have left their homeland in several waves in the pursuit either of better economic conditions, or political freedom during the communist regime. In some cases their target destinations were neighbouring countries and in others they went overseas. Some Slovaks have found themselves beyond the borders of Slovakia, in communities in places such as Poland and Ukraine.

According to official censuses, estimates of Slovak embassies and Slovak organisations living abroad as well as the Office of Slovaks Living Abroad (ÚSZZ), around 2.2 million people and their descendants currently



The Statue of Liberty in New York has welcomed many Slovak emigrants. Photo: SITA

avow Slovak origin in more than 50 countries around the world.

Foreign migration expert Boris Divinský is sceptical of this figure.

"People abroad claim to have 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th generation Slovak ancestors when their ancestors emigrated mostly between

1870 and 1914," Divinský told the Slovak Spectator. "The same people also claim to have Czech, Polish, Hungarian and other ancestors."

And with respect to experience to date he expects a natural assimilation of emigrants from Slovakia and their descendants into the majority society.

## In search of a better life

Since the end of the 17th century, thousands of Slovaks have left their native country but have maintained their nationality by becoming part of minorities and communities abroad. Countries such as America, Canada, France and Australia have become their new homes.

Slovaks began to migrate in large volumes to America in the 19th century and most of them were hired for manual labour in mines and forests. They were low-wage earners in America but still made more than they would have in what was then the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

See OSEAS pg 8

Institutions and organisations  
of Slovaks living abroad

## Office for Slovaks Living Abroad

(Úrad pre Slovákov žijúcich v zahraničí - ÚSZZ)

It is the organisation of the Slovak Cabinet Office and carries out the state policy with regards to Slovaks living abroad. It issues certificates of Slovak living abroad, administers a grant system, by which it supports activities of Slovaks living around the world, presents the culture of Slovaks living abroad in Slovakia and cooperates with organisations and groups of Slovaks living abroad.

www.uszz.sk

## Friends of Slovakia

The mission of this US-based non-profit organisation of volunteers founded in 2001 is to strengthen friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between the United States and Slovakia, as nations sharing similar values of freedom, democracy and a market economy. The site is in English.

www.friendsofslovakia.org

## Slovak Centre

This is a London-based, non-profit, politically independent organisation established in 2004, whose aim is to unite the Slovak community around the world and to represent Slovak interests in all aspects. The site is both in English and Slovak.

www.slovakcentre.co.uk

## Slovak in exile (Slovák v exile)

This portal of Slovaks living abroad launched by volunteers from around the world in 2004 offers practical information for Slovaks living abroad as well as their personal experiences. The site is in Slovak.

www.exil.sk

## Slovaks around the world (Slováci vo svete)

This portal was launched by the World Association of Slovaks Living Abroad - SZSZ in 2007. SZSZ was launched in 2002 in relation to the older tradition of umbrella organisations of Slovaks living abroad free of regional or political limitations. It covers 80 organisations from 23 countries.

www.slovacivosvete.sk (Slovak only)

## Becoming a certified Slovak

The status of 'Slovak living abroad' may be granted to Slovaks living outside of the country who do not have permanent residence in the Slovak Republic but have Slovak citizenship. Similarly, those who do not possess Slovak citizenship but maintain that they or their relatives are Slovak nationals can also be granted this status. From January 1, 2006 the document proving this is the Certificate of Slovak Living Abroad (Osvedčenie Slováka žijúceho v zahraničí) which replaced the previously issued Expatriate Card (Preukaz zahraničného Slováka).

The Office for Slovaks Living Abroad (ÚSZZ) issues certificates of Slovak living abroad as per the Act on Slovaks living abroad. According to the law in question, the certificate holder obtains a temporary residence permit. Furthermore, the holder does not need a Slovak work permit and can start a business in Slovakia or get a trade licence. The certificate also enables them to obtain citizenship after an uninterrupted three-year stay in Slovakia. It also enables its holders to study at Slovak universities.

An application for the certificate, completed in Slovak, must be submitted by mail or in person to a Slovak embassy or consulate, or in person to the ÚSZZ in Slovakia.

The application must be accompanied by a document verifying Slovak nationality (such as a school diploma or certificate, identification card, or military identification card) or that of some of the applicant's direct ancestors up to the third generation as well as a document verifying their Slovak cultural and language awareness.

Applicants who fail to present any of these documents may submit a written testimony from a Slovak ethnic organisation active in their place of residence, they may submit a notarised statement signed by at least two Slovak expatriates or Slovak citizens living in the same country.

Other documents required include certificates of no criminal record in Slovakia and the applicant's place of residency as well as a birth certificate, marriage certificate and passport.

For more information on the application process and required documents, go to www.uszz.sk

Up to the end of 2005, the certificate was issued by the Slovak Foreign Affairs Ministry in the form of the expatriate card. The ministry issued a total of 10,772 cards. Since 2006 certificates have been issued by the ÚSZZ. During that time, the office has recorded a rise in applications for the certificate. More than 1,000 people applied in 2007, compared to fewer than 680 in 2006.

In 2008 the office issued 1,241 certificates of 'Slovak living abroad', boosting the total number of people holding the status to about 13,000.

Sources: TASR, ÚSZZ, and official government reports



## FOCUS shorts

### Canadians seek Slovak passports

SLOVAKIA's EU membership has inspired some Canadians with Slovak origins to obtain Slovak citizenship. Canada, like Slovakia, recognises double citizenship, and Canadians with both passports can travel freely within the whole European Union, the *Hospodárske Noviny* business daily wrote.

The Slovak Embassy in Ottawa confirmed an increased interest in obtaining Slovak citizenship. However, many ap-

plicants who were born to Slovaks speak almost no Slovak.

"Their level of knowledge of the Slovak language is very low," said Ivan Chomo, the Slovak consul in Ottawa, as cited by the daily. "I have to say that most descendants of Slovaks born in Canada do not master the Slovak language and that they do not even know the basics of the language. They have problems filling in the application form."

### Summer school of journalism

AS IN PREVIOUS years, the Office of Slovaks Living Abroad (ÚSZZ) has prepared, in cooperation with the School of Journalism at Comenius University's Faculty of Philosophy, the Summer School of Journalism for young Slovaks living abroad and working as journalists. The one-week course, attended by journalists from Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Ukraine and Sweden, took place between August 9 and 15.

It was the seventh edition of

this programme, the ÚSZZ reported on its website.

The journalists became acquainted with the system of media in Slovakia. Apart from lectures and practical training they also met top Slovak journalists and visited news agencies as well as electronic media outlets.

Apart from cultural and historical sights in Bratislava they also visited a folk ceramics workshop and the Museum of Ludovít Štúr in Modra.

Compiled by Spectator staff

## OSEAS: Slovak migrants

Continued from pg 6

According to Peter Zubko of the Historical Institute at the Catholic University in Ružomberok in his book on the "History of Slovak Migration", this culminated at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. At that time, the territory of current Slovakia had the highest rate of emigration in relation to its population. Slovaks were also moving to large centres such as Budapest and Vienna.

About half a million Slovaks went to the United States between 1880 and 1914. Zubko also believes that about 200,000 people left Slovakia between the world wars for the USA, Canada, France, Belgium and Argentina. The next wave of emigration took place between 1945 and 1989, when about 100,000 emigrated, often illegally, in protest against the communist regime, fleeing persecution as well as to pursue better careers and lives.

The current migration indicators signal a possible further increase in Slovak communities abroad, particularly in European countries with stronger economies.

Slovaks living in neighbouring countries hold the status of national minorities, for example in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, and Croatia, according to the State Policy on Care for Slovaks Living Abroad to 2015, which the Slovak government approved in August 2008.

In the Czech Republic, the Slovak minority holds a special position, which is a result of the former common state as well as the minor language barrier and cultural similarity. The Office of Slovaks Living Abroad (ÚSZZ) estimates the number of

Slovaks living there to be 375,000.

According to ÚSZZ, the biggest community abroad lives in the USA and consists of roughly 1.2 million people. There are also large communities in Hungary (about 110,000), Canada (100,000), and Serbia (about 56,000).

Slovak communities in western Europe and overseas are divided into three groups. The first group consists of descendants of emigrants, who live in typical target migration countries and nowadays are widely assimilated, although their relationship to the country of their ancestors and pride in their Slovak origin persists. In overseas countries, especially in the US and Canada, many are part of organisations with long traditions.

The second group includes those from the migration wave after 1989, which headed in particular to western European countries as well as less typical destinations overseas. Most of these people are young to middle-aged and university educated, and have strong connections to home.

The third group consists of Slovaks who left Slovakia after its admission to the European Union in 2004 for more established EU member states. A number of large communities have formed in Great Britain, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Cyprus. These are also young to middle-aged and university educated. They are also closely linked to home and likely to return.

Divinský estimates that between 220,000-240,000 Slovaks are currently working abroad, however this is expected to decrease as a result of the economic downturn.

## INVEST: Kechnec success encourages US

Continued from pg 6

"The meeting between the Slovak Ambassador to the US, Peter Burian, and a representative of significant Slovak fraternal unions active in the US on July 31 can be listed among such recent events focused on the strengthening of cooperation with expats," said Koziak.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss planned activities and priorities in the near future and to search for opportunities for closer cooperation between the Slovak Embassy in the US, fraternal unions and organisations of expats. According to Koziak, representatives of the fraternal unions were also interested in opportunities for further development of economic cooperation with Slovakia. At the meeting a presentation of activities of the NGO Friends of Slovakia took place in order to assess opportunities for extending its activities to other parts of the US.

Another activity mentioned by Koziak was a meeting of honorary consuls, who have direct contacts with the Slovak community, which took place in the US on March 19 and 20 at the embassy in Washington. The most effective mechanisms of cooperation and activities of all bodies representing Slovakia in the US, with a stress on investment opportunities in Slovakia, were discussed.

"Vojtech Ferencz, the director general for strategies at the Slovak Economy Ministry, and Jozef Konkoly, the mayor of Kechnec, were valued attendees," said Koziak, adding that Kechnec, a village in eastern Slovakia, has been very successful in attracting direct foreign investments. "The presence of the ministry's representative and the mayor of Kechnec, where the biggest industrial park in Slovakia is located, at a session of the honorary consulates was used to organise a series of meetings with potential American investors in Washing-



Slovak spas are attractive to foreign tourists.

Photo: Sme

ton, DC and its vicinity, as well as in New York."

### Australia

On the opposite side of the globe in Australia, the trade and economic department in Canberra also supports business activities of Slovak expats where possible. The Office of Slovaks Living Abroad (ÚSZZ) estimates the Slovak community there to be 15,000.

"I view their activities as a positive step towards fulfilment of several departmental objectives such as the export of Slovak products and services, support of foreign investments in Slovakia and assistance in the development of Slovak tourism," Dušan Horniak, the head of the trade and economic department at the Embassy of Slovakia to Australia told *The Slovak Spectator*.

As a concrete example he mentioned the cooperation of his department and the Australian travel agency European Spa Tours Ltd during participation at the tourist fair Travel Xpo in Sydney. Also, the Australian travel agency Danube Travel Agency and the Slovakia's honorary consulate in Melbourne assisted his department in holding the Slovak Day in Melbourne.

Horniak claims that evalu-

ation of the interest of Slovaks living in Australia in such support and cooperation depends largely on what they are doing there as many of them are not active business owners.

"If they show interest in Slovak commerce, I do my best to help them as much as possible," said Horniak.

However he does not wait for the expats to approach him. He also contacts expats himself and offers assistance where he can. As Slovaks these people need little assistance in the area of the Slovak environment and mentality.

Horniak would like to extend this cooperation as far as possible in the future as he believes in its positive aspects.

"I believe this to be very effective in informing foreign business people about Slovakia who may have very few dealings there or don't know a lot about it and therefore perceive it as a risky environment. In this case a bigger effort needs to be made," said Horniak.

Of projects by the Slovak trade and economic department in Australia which are in the pipeline Horniak mentioned a presentation of business and investment opportunities in Slovakia prepared in cooperation with the Slovak honorary consul

in Brisbane Michal Horváth. Furthermore, Horniak's department is preparing a presentation of Slovak tourist destinations in Melbourne with Margaret Nagy, the director of the Australian travel agency Danube Travel Agency and Slovak honorary consul in Melbourne, Vojtech Markuš. He is also preparing a presentation in Sydney of Slovak spas, with Eva Santo, the director of the Australian travel agency European Spa Tours.

Horniak views Slovak tourism as a promising generator of Australian investment and cooperation.

"I'm also interested in supporting other areas of business, particularly the export of Slovak products and services, which is something that Slovak expatriates have shown interest in.

### Little interest in Canada

Canada has one of the largest Slovak communities (around 100,00 according to the ÚSZZ), but interest in Slovak commerce is said to be relatively low.

"These people are firmly integrated into Canadian society and live and work as other Canadians," claims Vladimír Wiedermann, the head of the Trade and Economic Department at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic to Canada. "Most of these people are employed here."

He believes that maintaining contact with Slovaks abroad is a good thing as it helps to promote a positive view of Slovakia and boosts potential for mutually advantageous cooperation.

"Citizens such as these, who have established themselves abroad, could be an asset to Slovakia's reputation."

However Wiedermann is sceptical as to whether or not giving special treatment to Slovak business people is entirely fair.

"This kind of support is provided to all commercial activity and those with reasonable and realistic objectives, regardless of their roots."

### ADVERTISEMENT

## Local Bank with a French Background: Komerční banka Bratislava

In order to be successful on new markets, an international company needs to provide the same level of quality services abroad as they would at home. In Slovakia, such services are provided by Komerční banka Bratislava (KB Bratislava) which focuses on medium to large sized enterprises, offering a selected range of products and services by the French financial group Société Générale.

### Specialisation = Better service

The belief that 'specialisation means better service' holds true in the banking sector. Unlike the 'giants', smaller institutions can take care of their clients with greater focus and precision which is what strengthens the position

of Komerční banka Bratislava on the Slovak market.

KB Bratislava serves Slovak and foreign medium to large sized companies, providing them with financial and consulting services which are perfectly tailored to their business needs. These products and services include cash management, operation and investment financing, foreign trade financing, investment banking, financial consulting, and leasing of technologies and vehicle

fleets. We have four business centres across Slovakia, in Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Košice and Žilina.

### International know-how, local experience

Our long-term strategy is to offer to all of our clients modern and stable financial solutions based on the seasoned know-how of our parent banks- Komerční banka, one of the largest financial groups in the Czech Republic and originally a leading corporate bank, and Société Générale, one of the top European banking institutions.



SOCIETE GENERALE GROUP

www.koba.sk  
0800 118 100

# Spreading the word through Slovak Studies

**University programmes help to maintain and spread the knowledge of Slovakia's history and culture**

BY MICHAELA STANKOVÁ  
Spectator staff

THE PRESERVATION of the language and culture of a nation abroad would be very difficult, if not impossible, without the efforts made in the area of education. It is for this reason that Centres of Slovak language and culture are significant players in the preservation of connections of Slovaks abroad to their native country, to promote the Slovak culture among the local population and to develop Slovak scholarships outside the country.

Scholars focusing their research on Slovakia are members of the Slovak Studies Association (SSA). This is a non-profit organisation registered in Pennsylvania, currently headed by Kevin Deegan Krause, associate professor at the Department of Political Science of Wayne State University, who spent some time as a Fulbright scholar at Comenius University in Bratislava.

"The main idea is that we are a community of scholars (and those who appreciate academia) who exchange experiences and expertise in many fields," Deegan Krause told *The Slovak Spectator*.

The members of the SSA, who currently number around 100 and are mainly from North America, meet annually. However, Deegan Krause expects to see an increase in membership and activities within the association in the near future.

## Pittsburgh

One of the most eminent centres of Slovak academia is the University of Pittsburgh, the only university in the US where students can opt for a minor in Slovak Studies. The Slovak Studies Programme is led by Martin Votruba.

The Slavic Department at the University of Pittsburgh has offered Slovak classes since the late 1960s but the university was unable to finance the teaching staff of such a minor language on a permanent basis. Professor Oscar Swan, the head of the department in the 1980s, turned to fraternal organisations of several groups of Slavic immigrants hoping to secure sufficient funds to support their languages.

"A small group of Slovak organisations came together and, over a period of about 15 years, donated enough money to set up a permanent endowment at



Slovak can be cool: it is even considered an 'exotic' subject by some US and Canadian students. Photo: SITA

the university," Votruba told *The Slovak Spectator*. "No more donations were needed since then as it is self-maintaining, so to say. The University of Pittsburgh has invested the money, reinvests part of the income and uses another part of what the endowment earns as well as its own funds to support the only permanent Slovak Studies Programme at an American university."

Culture courses in Slovak film, immigration, history and literature attract some 20 students each year, while around 10 usually enrol in Elementary Slovak classes.

"Up to half of the language students have an ancestor or two who emigrated from Slovakia, sometimes a hundred or more years ago," Votruba said. "This is not surprising, as Pittsburgh and south-west Pennsylvania have the highest percentage of Slovak-Americans of all the US states."

Students register for the language courses in order to meet their foreign language requirement. They often base their decision on the reputation of the course, or because they want to focus on Slovakia or central Europe in fields such as political science, history, anthropology and government studies. The culture courses attract students who focus on its main subjects, film or history.

Votruba is appreciative of the grants offered by the Slovak Ministry of Education which enable a few of his students to attend a brief summer language course in Slovakia each year.

## Cleveland

The Slovak studies programme has also been offered at John Carroll University since spring 1982. It began with a culture and civilization course on Czechoslovakia. These courses focused on the country itself and on Slovaks in American history, culture, and society.

Formal Slovak language study was first offered in autumn 1983, with the arrival of the first Fulbright Visiting Lecturer of Slovak Language and Culture from Slovakia. Six language courses were then taught at the Slovak faculty over the next 12 years (for academic credit) during the day and once a week in the evenings. Free courses were also offered for the Greater Cleveland Area.

Since the conclusion of the Fulbright programme, Slovak language has continued to be offered as part of the Slavic languages course of the Department of Classical and Modern Languages and Cultures for which Gerald J. Sabo has been responsible since autumn 1981. He currently has 17 students on the course – some of them of Slovak, Czech, Polish and Croatian origin.

"We have contributed to furthering knowledge of Slovakia and Slovak studies in both the historical and present-day context," Sabo told *The Slovak Spectator*.

John Carroll University and the University of Pittsburgh are the only two US universities where students can study Slovak as part of regular courses for university credits. Sabo also stated that his institute used to offer follow-up Slovak courses, for countrymen in particular.

"Cleveland holds a special place in the history of Slovak Americans, and continues to do so," Sabo said. "In October 1990, on the anniversary of the signing of the Cleveland Treaty, Cleveland and Bratislava became sister cities."

On April 30, 1999 the John Carroll University opened the Slovak Heritage Room at the Grasselli Library.

## Ottawa

In Canada, the only institution focusing on Slovak studies is the Chair in Slovak History &

Culture at the University of Ottawa, presently held by M. Mark Stolarik, a specialist on the history of Slovak immigration to North America. It was founded in 1990 with the help of contributions from Slovak communities in the western hemisphere, from resources obtained by Dr. Joseph M. Kirschbaum in the 1980s.

"The mission of the Chair in Slovak History & Culture is to teach students all about Slovakia," Stolarik told *The Slovak Spectator*. "I also recruit graduate students to write their dissertations on some aspect of Slovak history, at the moment I have two PhD students doing so."

The third-year courses focusing on Slovaks and their neighbours before and after 1780 usually attract a full class of 50 students, as well as the class on "The Rise and Fall of Czechoslovakia". According to Stolarik, the history programme is very popular.

"I suppose students take my courses in Slovak history because it is an exotic subject and they want to learn something about central Europe," he said, adding that most of the students are non-Slovaks.

Stolarik has also established a Slovak library and archives at the university with several thousand books and periodicals about Slovakia and Slovaks, located within its Morisset Library.

As for his cooperation with Slovak universities, the most notable activity was probably his teaching a mini-course on Slovak Immigration to North America at the Catholic University in Ružomberok. Apart from this, his cooperation with Slovak universities has been limited.

"Even though we have an exchange programme with Comenius University, nothing has been organised," Stolarik said.

## Slovak can be easy!

SLOVAK language teaching is supported by the Education Ministry at 25 universities abroad. Lecturers in Slovak language and culture work primarily in countries which have larger Slovak communities, for instance at universities in Budapest, Szeged, Warsaw, Krakow, Katowice, Bucharest, Belgrade, Novi Sad and Uzhgorod, according to the Report on State Policy on Slovaks Living Abroad, approved by the government on August 26, 2009.

A Slovak language course for beginners is now available year-round through the [www.e-slovak.sk](http://www.e-slovak.sk) portal operated by Studia Academica Slovaca, the Centre of Slovak as a Foreign Language. E-Slovak is an e-learning course for Slovak as a foreign language aimed at teaching basic language skills which can be applied in day-to-day situations. Studia Academica Slovaca (SAS), The Centre of Slovak as a Foreign Language is a research and study centre of the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava.

"We are trying to be innovative and to make our programme available also to those who cannot come to Slovakia and do not have the opportunity to learn Slovak in the place where they live," Jana Pekarovičová, the director of SAS, told *The Slovak Spectator*. E-Slovak is supported by the Education Ministry and it is available free of charge to everyone with access to the internet. At the moment there are programmes at level A, for beginners, but experts from SAS are currently working on adding intermediate and advanced programmes, which should arrive soon. According to Pekarovičová, new participants are registering for the programme every day. By the end of last year there were more than 400 of them.

The course is aimed primarily at foreign students of Slovak and Slavonic languages, Slovaks living abroad or ex-pats, applicants for study programmes in Slovakia as part of development aid offered by the Slovak Republic, participants in the Studia Academica Slovaca Summer School of Slovak Language and Culture, and at all people interested in studying Slovak language and culture.

According to Pekarovičová, each year about 150 participants meet in Bratislava to take part in the summer school. The SAS Summer School is the oldest summer language school in Slovakia. This year's school, the 45th, welcomed a record 162 participants from 30 countries around the world.

"The jubilee 45th edition was very colourful, in terms of the ethnic composition as well as the age range of the participants," Pekarovičová said. According to her, a majority of the participants are typically university students who are studying Slovak language and culture in their home countries.

"These students come because they study the Slovak language as a subject or as a specialisation, and they need to obtain a better knowledge not only of the language but also of the country, its history and culture," she told *The Slovak Spectator*. However, the SAS Summer School is also attractive for diplomats, foreign managers or lecturers of foreign languages working in Slovakia, as well as for the children of immigrants of Slovak origin and those who have a Slovak partner.

More information on the activities of SAS can be found at [www.fphil.uniba.sk/sas](http://www.fphil.uniba.sk/sas).

By Michaela Stanková

## FOCUS shorts

### Slovak festivities in Bácsky Petrovec

IN EARLY August the 48th traditional Slovak National Festivities took place in Bácsky Petrovec in Serbia. Slovakia's deputy prime minister, Dušan Čaplovič, attended the festivities.

"Slovaks in Serbia's Vojvodina region make up one of the biggest bodies of Slovaks living abroad, of which we are very proud," Čaplovič told SITA prior to his departure. "Since the arrival of our first ancestors in this territory a quarter of a millennium has elapsed and all the generations up to today have managed to convey and preserve Slovak national awareness, authentic culture, traditions and habits, dances and songs, but especially beautiful Slovak [language]. This is really exceptional. After crossing Hungary, you get the impression that you are back in Slovakia."

The local Slovak minority in Serbia cherishes Slovak culture, but also has its own

schools and media and Slovaks from Vojvodina have representatives in the government and parliament of Vojvodina, according to Čaplovič.

The Slovak National Festivities is the biggest annual presentation of culture and art of the Slovak minority in Serbia. They live in particular in the northern part of Vojvodina, creating the biggest cohesive Slovak community in the world.

The community numbers about 56,000 out of the estimated total of 60,000 Slovaks living in Serbia. Their ancestors come in particular from parts of what is now central and northern Slovakia. They settled in Vojvodina about 260 years ago.

The festivities offered a colourful programme, with many social, cultural and sports events, including theatre performances and concerts.

Compiled by Spectator staff from press reports