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## Slovakian Political Scientist Gives IWU Students Eyewitness View of Post-Communist Eastern Europe

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## **Slovakian Political Scientist Gives IWU Students**

### **Eyewitness View of Post-Communist Eastern Europe**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. What's life like in the 16 new nations of eastern and central Europe that have emerged from the rubble of communism?

Illinois Wesleyan University students are getting an eyewitness account from Darina Malova, a political scientist from Slovakia, a new European democracy born after the collapse of communism.

And, about 10 IWU students will get a chance to see these sweeping political, economic, and social changes first-hand, when they take a three-week trip to Slovakia and the Czech Republic in May with Malova and Kathleen Montgomery, an IWU assistant professor of political science.

"These two countries used to be one," Malova said. "Bratislava and Prague are historically beautiful cities," noting the first-class reputations of their opera, ballet, and cultural life.

"We will study why they split," she explained, "particularly the nationalism and ethnic reasons sensitive issues which led to the breakup of Czechoslovakia."

Students on the trip also will study minority issues, especially involving gypsies, and environmental concerns that are legacies of communism and the drive to quickly build huge industries.

#### **Teaches Cutting-Edge Courses**

Malova, an associate professor of political science at Komenskeho University in the Slovakian capital of Bratislava, is on a three-month teaching stint at IWU. At home, she teaches cutting-edge courses on Slovak government and politics, European integration, constitutionalism and human rights, and the transition to democracy. About a dozen IWU students are enrolled in her course, Gender and Ethnic Issues in Eastern Europe. The course is as contemporary as the headlines reporting carnage in Kosovo, the scene of ethnic bloodshed in the shadow of the former Yugoslavia.

"Political leaders in that part of the world," Malova explained, "draw support from an ideology based on nationalism. This hurts peaceful cooperation and coexistence with minorities. It pits one group against another."

#### **Gender and Ethnic Issues**

The gender and ethnic-issues course deals with an eclectic range of subjects, spanning problems associated with making the tough transition from government-controlled to free-market economies, to the politics of moving from communism to democracy.

For example, the course focuses on the roles of women under communism, an ideology committed to full employment.

"So, women had to work under communism," Malova explained, "and most communist regimes provided a broad social policy including day care, allowances for children, and paid maternity leaves of six-to-nine months.

"Now after the collapse of communism," Malova added, "women have the right to be at home, but they also have been victims of the transition [from communism to capitalism]. They are part of a huge group that's first fired and facing unemployment.

"Working women," she concluded, "face a double burden of on-the-job responsibilities and also taking care of their families, children, older relatives, and extended families."

### **Clinton Impeachment**

As a political scientist, Malova was interested in observing President Bill Clinton's recent impeachment, trial, and acquittal, noting, "It really wasn't possible to follow the case in Europe.

"I just wonder what happened to the American people," Malova observed, "that they are so interested in this kind of private issue. At home, there are boundaries between what's public and what's private."

To illustrate her point, Malova pointed out that at French President Francois Mitterand's funeral his wife and mistress stood together at his graveside.

### **Collapse of Communism**

Malova saw the telltale signs of communism's growing weakness, when she was a student in Moscow in the late 1980s.

"We suspected something was going on," she said. "We learned of developments in Poland and Hungary and that the communists were bargaining with opponents.

"Another sign that something was going to happen," she explained, "was Gorbachev's policies," referring to moves toward openness and government restructuring launched by Soviet communist leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

"We were not prepared," Malova concedes for the collapse of communism and "had a really hard time," especially around 1990 dealing with unemployment.

Malova, a philosophy graduate, said: "I went through retraining myself in political science. I went to special summer schools to learn computers, political science, and English. I spent four or five years working 12 to 14 hours a day to educate myself in three fields."

Malova's experience tackling political science was particularly wrenching since the social sciences were tightly controlled under all communist regimes especially after the Prague Spring of 1968, a failed attempt at sweeping

political and economic reforms led by Alexander Dubcek, first secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Dubcek's liberalization led to a Soviet invasion, a political crackdown, and his ouster from office.

Under communism, Malova recalled, it was difficult to get into college. When she started her philosophy studies in 1977, there were 300-400 applications for a scant 10 places.

"It was a paradox of the communist regime," she explained. "A free education was in the constitution, but you couldn't get into the school you wanted to go to."

### **Malova's Background**

Malova was born in central Slovakia in Ziar nad Hronom, a town with a huge aluminum factory. As a youngster, she attended schools that put her on a college course.

However, her family carried some heavy political baggage, dating to the late 1940s, when her father was kicked out of the communist party. Her father a dedicated anti-fascist who survived a concentration camp experience became dismayed with communism, when he compared reality with the ideology's promise.

Malova didn't plan on being a teacher. However, she likes having a tangible impact on students and finds classroom work rewarding. "Many of my former students," she explains, "are in top government positions and they come to me for advice and my opinions."

However, Malova sees differences between U.S. students and those in Slovakia.

"Students here," she said, "are much more active and not afraid to speak out. Students in Slovakia and central Europe are not used to speaking out and offering their opinions and ideas. At home, I have to first teach students how to express their ideas."

In 1993, Malova spent two months in the United States at Harvard University and the Center for European Studies, working on comparative transitions in Eastern Europe.

She also is the author of many articles and book chapters about Slovakia, jokingly referring to herself as the "Slovak country writer" because of her knowledge of the nation and her English language skills.

### **Slovakia Profiled**

Slovakia is a central European nation about twice the size of New Hampshire. It borders Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine.

Slovakia's population is about 5.4 million. Its capital and largest city is Bratislava, with a population of approximately 446,600.

The Slovak Republic is a parliamentary democracy with executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The legislature, a unicameral body called the National Council of the Slovak Republic, has 150 seats and members are elected by popular vote to four-year terms.

Forty-two years of communist rule ended with the election in 1989 of playwright Vaclav Havel as president of Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of sweeping but peaceful political change, dubbed the Velvet Revolution.

A strong Slovak nationalist movement emerged by 1991, seeking an independent and sovereign state. A 1992 general election failed to reconcile Czech and Slovak elements within a federation and agreement was reached to separate.

On Jan. 1, 1993, the Czechoslovak federation was dissolved peacefully, giving birth to the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

### **Fulbright Program**

Malova's IWU visit is under the auspices of an exchange program sponsored by the Washington, D.C.-based Fulbright Association.

Patti McGill Peterson, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Council for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), wrote IWU about Malova's appointment, pointing out: "Colleges and universities are increasingly challenged to internationalize by developing and strengthening international programs and by adding a global, multicultural dimension to the traditional curriculum.

"Given the increasing interdependency of nations around the world," Peterson continued, "there has never been a more important time for international scholarly exchange

This year, according to CIES, about 750 U.S. faculty and professionals will receive Fulbright grants to lecture and conduct research abroad. Approximately 725 visiting scholars like Malova also will receive awards to come to the United States, primarily as

researchers. These Fulbrighters join tens of thousands of U.S. and foreign scholars who have participated in the program since it was established in 1946.

The Fulbright Program is sponsored and funded by the U.S

Information Agency. Funding also is provided by participating governments and host institutions in the United States and abroad. A presidentially appointed J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board formulates policy guidelines and makes the final selection of all grantees.

The Fulbright program is named for U.S. Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), who served in the U.S. Senate from 1944-75 and chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 1959-74. He gained international recognition in 1946 for the Fulbright Act, which provided for the exchange of students and teachers between the United States and many other nations. Before entering politics, Fulbright served as president of the University of Arkansas.

### **About IWU**

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, and a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts.