

Skype Conversation Report

On April 20 at 3:30 P.M. U.S. Central time and 10:30 P.M. on April 20 in the Czech Republic, Jose Campose and I contacted Veronica Kamenikova via Skype. Our connection was tenuous at first and broke while we were doing introduction, but our second connection held out.

We began with basic introductions. Veronica is 24 and in the 3rd year of her 5 year program. While she is studying law, Veronica says it would probably be difficult for her to practice law in the U.S. or Western Europe due to differences between the Civil law system in the Czech Republic and the systems used in Western nations. Veronica is studying in a city of roughly 300,000 which is actually very large for the Czech Republic. Veronica indicated that the Czechs are somewhat close minded as they are touched by communism and the effects of this can be seen in various aspects of Czech society. She noted that the Czech Republic is not terribly diversified. She said there are few cultural deviations, though American tourists are fairly common. Veronica indicated she has been to Miami Florida, but she recognized this as a vacation destination, and indicates she would like to see more of the “real” U.S.

On the subject of Americans, her view was slightly derisive. She indicated that Czechs see Americans as totally egocentric and materially obsessed. Her view was that to many in the EU, the “War on Terror” enacted and propagated by the Bush administration, is merely a façade underneath which lies a struggle for control of natural resources being carried out by the whims of the wealthy elite. Jose and I made no argument with that synopsis, though it seems that EU citizens do not necessarily

recognize that few in the U.S. stand to gain directly from an increased access to Middle Eastern oil. Veronica was more optimistic about the election of President Obama and supportive of his efforts to reach out to various leaders. Veronica explained that while many in the Czech Republic are hesitant to ally with the U.S. the majority fear Russia more than retaliation for being seen as a friend of the United States. Therefore the U.S. will likely enjoy the support of the Czech Republic.

After introductions and weather (its was around 40 there) we talked about matters relating to international emergency law. The first subject we addressed was the avian flu. It has been estimated that with even a modest outbreak about 200,000 people would die in the U.S. Veronica expressed skepticism about the flu as she is not aware of anyone in the Czech Republic who has been affected by the avian flu. She suspects that the flu may be something the media and government have over-exaggerated like Y2K. Veronica expressed a healthy suspicion with government in general, pointing out that people are often too quick to accept what they hear without asking questions or investigating on their own. Jose pointed out that if the flue is a real threat, that it would be extremely difficult to get people out of threatened areas. Building on Veronica's concern over government control, we conceded that Emergency Health regulations do allow the government a great deal of power over citizens such as mandatory vaccinations and quarantine.

The subject of the missile defense system came up next. Veronica indicated that there is some concern in the Czech Republic about allowing the missile system to be located there. For one, the Czechs are fairly egocentric themselves. They do not truly understand what the system is for, and to many that alone is reason enough to oppose it. Further, there are many Czechs of Russian descent in the Czech Republic who are more in favor of Russia than the U.S and who see the defense system as U.S. aggression.

Finally, we discussed the earthquakes in L'Aquila. I provided statistics I had gathered on the death toll as well as the numbers displaced and the material damage. Veronica had paid more attention to a lone scientist who travelled through the city slightly before the quake, warning people to evacuate. The scientist was incarcerated for trying to incite a public panic.

We ended again on social matters. Beer is apparently a point of pride in the Czech Republic, and transportation in Brno, where Veronica lives is often on foot or by bicycle. While there are cars, the city is small enough that they are not entirely necessary commodities.

Over all, the conversation was lively and interesting. There was a great deal of cross culture curiosity, but everyone got along amicably and it was interesting to hear the perspective of someone from the EU on the U.S. and various world events. Our conversation lasted slightly over an hour, ending at 5:03 U.S. Central time, roughly midnight in the Czech Republic