

U.S. President Meets with Champions of Freedom

February 28, 2005

United States President George W. Bush met with 21 “Champions of Freedom” from 13 Central and Eastern European countries, including the Republic of Macedonia, during his visit to Bratislava, Slovakia, on February 24, 2005.

The group included Mirjana Lazarova Trajkovska, who since 2003 has served as Constitutional Court Judge. She previously served as President of the State Electoral Commission (SEC), as Head of the Human Rights Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and as Assistant Minister of Interior.

Speaking to a large crowd in Hviezdoslavovo Square in Bratislava on February 24, President Bush said: “With us here today is a group of remarkable men and women from across Central and Eastern Europe, who have fought freedom's fight in their homelands and have earned the respect of the world. We welcome you. We thank you for your example, for your courage and for your sacrifice.”

President Bush added that: “The advance of freedom is the concentrated work of generations. ...Eventually, the call of liberty comes to every mind and every soul. And one day, freedom's promise will reach every people and every nation.”

A press release issued in conjunction with the Champions of Freedom meeting described the contributions of Judge Trajkovska as follows:

While serving as SEC President, she bravely stood up to threats and intimidation from the Interior Minister at the time, who tried to force her to falsify the results of the 2002 parliamentary elections in favor of the ruling party. Trajkovska refused to give in to the intimidation, and the ruling party was ousted in elections deemed free and fair by international observers, thereby strengthening the independent status of the SEC and the integrity of the democratic system in Macedonia.

Among other “Champions of Freedom” who met with President Bush were: Irina Krasovskaya, founder and president of the We Remember Foundation in Belarus, which she started after her husband’s disappearance in order to seek justice for the disappeared and other victims of political repression; Georgian parliamentarian George Bokeria, who co-founded the non-governmental organization "The Liberty Institute" to defend human rights and freedom of the press; Sonja Licht, director of the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence; and Natalya Dmytruk, the sign language interpreter for Ukrainian State Television whose courageous on-the-air actions following the fraudulent run-off presidential election in November 2004 inspired journalists and citizens throughout Ukraine.

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