

Dear Chairman/Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

In Ohio many people trace their roots to Eastern Europe, including myself. I came to Ohio in 1968 after the Soviet led invasion of Czechoslovakia. It was thanks to my family's location in Cleveland, Ohio that my transition was successful. I graduated from Kent State University with a degree in Architecture, became a registered architect in the State of Ohio and had a successful career retiring at the age of 56. To my knowledge there was no mechanism to assist immigrants from Eastern Europe to facilitate settlement, education and entrepreneurship in Ohio. The proposed Commission and Office of Eastern European Affairs could address that situation.

Perhaps more significantly in my mind, the general awareness and recognition of the cultures beyond the "Black Forest" – the lands east of Germany, would dispel the perception of backwardness, lack of culture and solely agrarian subsistence often held by the public. After all some of the great world composers, such as Dvorak (Czech), Smetana(Czech), Chopin (Polish) and Liszt (Hungarian) just to name a few come from the lands beyond the "Black Forest". The many scientists such as Tesla (Serbian) and Madam Curie (Polish) and poets and writers, many of whom are recognized in the Cleveland Cultural Gardens – unique park depicting over 30 nationalities, attest to the sophistication of the peoples historically inhabiting Eastern Europe. The proposed Commission and Office of Eastern European Affairs could provide for dissemination of pertinent information to eradicate this misconception.

Despite the large number of Ohioans who claim East European ancestry, the history courses taught in our schools often focus on "Western History" only, often completely ignoring the heritage of so many Ohioans. It is true that most of the nations in question found their birthplace in the tragedy of World War One. While this tragic war was known for its trench warfare, prolonged and static fight in the West, the same war in the East was fluid and just as deadly an event. The changing borders gave rise to the new nations we now recognize; Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and so on. This was on the insistence of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and his 14 Points doctrine guiding the conclusion and settlement of WWI. Similarly the Second World War is generally perceived as concluded on May 8th, 1945. But in the East, especially in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the fighting continued for two more years as exemplified by the "Forest Brothers" – partisan (gorilla) units fighting Soviet domination. These are just two examples how the history of Eastern Europe is overlooked. The Office of Eastern European Affairs could facilitate means for enhancing the education to include the events in this Eastern region.

I am often reminded how beautiful my home town of Prague is which leads to discussion about travel. Bringing more information about travel destinations in Eastern Europe could be another aspect of the proposed Office of Eastern European Affairs role, which is only a short step away from discussing potential commerce, cultural and artistic exchange.

I urge the legislators to establish and fund the Commission and Office of Eastern European Affairs in order to address the issues outlined above. Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion.

Paul Burik RA (Registered Architect in Ohio)

Sokol Greater Cleveland – President

Cleveland Bratislava Sister Cities - Trustee

Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation – Past President

Carpatho – Rusyn Society, Cleveland – member

International Hall of Fame 2019 Inductee

French Creek Foundation – Past President and founder