



Ambassador's Speeches

Reception for the 85th Anniversary of Austro-American Institute of Education (AAIE)

Ambassador's Residence, June 21, 2011

Magister Weissgaerber, Dr. Janda, Members of the Board of the Austro-American Institute, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of my wife Donna and myself, herzlich willkommen bei uns zu Hause. Es ist schön, dass so viele Freunde, Mitarbeiter und Partner des Austro-American Institute of Education heute hier sind.

We are pleased that so many have been able to accept our invitation and share in the celebration of the 85th anniversary of this fine institution.

As I was preparing for tonight's event, my staff shared with me a booklet with the earliest reports of the Austro-American Institute of Education. As I flipped through the pages, I noticed that from the very beginning ties between the Embassy and your Institute could not have been stronger. In fact, one of my predecessors, Albert Washburn, whom the book lists as American Minister – this is what they called Ambassadors in those days – acted as your Honorary President.

I also learned that Dr. Paul Dengler, the Institute's first director, received his principal inspiration for the founding of the America Institute during a trip to the United States in 1925. There he visited institutions such as International House in New York City, which was founded by the American philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, and the Institute of International Education, which was financed by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In the process, Dr. Dengler developed the idea of proposing similar centers for international students in a number of European capitals including Vienna. Dengler's lobbying was successful, and in March of 1926 the Austro-American Institute of Education otherwise known as the America Institute was founded with the support of virtually all key players in the education arena in Austria at the time. While modern technology has changed much in the course of the past 85 years, the spirit of the America Institute's founding days and its original mandate continue to be reflected in your activities today.

The America Institute offers language courses for children and adults, special courses for those who need technical vocabulary and information for American students here on study-abroad programs. Not to forget the cultural circle for those interested in U.S. society and culture, the exhibits and public lectures, and many other activities.

I was curious to learn that some of the Institute's earliest initiatives such as the "Vienna Summer School", which have brought many US students to Austria for language, social and cultural studies, or the "Wiener Internationale Hochschulkurse", continue to this very day.

Let me use this opportunity to thank the officers, in particular Magister Hermann Weissgaerber, the Chief Executive Officer, and his staff for their tireless efforts on behalf of U.S.-Austrian relations. I understand the Weissgaerber family can safely be called an "institution" on the Austrian education scene. I would also like to thank the Board for their prudent steering of the Institute's activities over the years.

Three weeks ago, we hosted a reception for the participants in a scientific conference commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Vienna Summit between President John F. Kennedy and Premier Nikita Khrushchev in June 1961. What we were reminded of by the historians' lectures presented at this conference was how dangerous a place the world was in those days, when the threat of a nuclear confrontation was clear and present. Against this backdrop we cannot praise enough the efforts of an institution such as the America Institute. Through your efforts in the sphere of educational exchanges, you help produce a kind of perpetual cohort of Ambassadors that typically continue to serve to connect their countries of origin and their host countries throughout their lives.

Particularly today, when mutual understanding is so important, it is in the interest of every country to produce an ever-growing "foreign service" of exchange students.

Let me close with a quote from the booklet I mentioned. It's a statement by the American Philosopher Nicholas Murray Butler, Nobel Prize Laureate, former president of Columbia University and co-founder of the Institute of International Education: He said, in 1931:

"Everywhere and always, whether in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, or in the Americas, we are laboring to develop and to strengthen the International Mind and to lay a firm and lasting foundation upon which the nations great and small may build a superstructure of durable peace with ample provision for human accord, human health, human happiness, and human satisfaction."

As the American Ambassador to Austria, I would say this mission is the work of our Embassy as well. We are proud to have such an outstanding partner in the Institute. I commend you for your long-standing commitment to educational exchange, and your contribution to relations between our two countries. Congratulations on your 85th anniversary, and many happy returns!

Vielen Dank!

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