

## Ripon Educational Fund Holds Spring Forum on Improving TransAtlantic Relations March 16, 2005



*Sen. Richard Lugar  
addresses the REF Forum*

(May 26, 2005) - On Wednesday, March 16, 2005, more than forty Ripon Educational Fund (REF) members, Congressional leaders, staffers, and friends joined Senator Richard G. Lugar (R-IN); His Excellency John Bruton, European Union Commission (EU) Ambassador to the United States; His Excellency András Simonyi, Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary; His Excellency Rastislav Kacer, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic; and REF Chairman Ed Bethune, for the group's annual Spring Forum. The roundtable luncheon, ***Improving Transatlantic Relations: Our Common Success Depends on How the United States and the European Union Wield our Hard and Soft Power***, was held in the U.S. Capitol.

Chairman Bethune kicked-off the event with a snapshot of REF's 2004 TransAtlantic Conference (TAC) to Budapest, Hungary, and how the lessons learned there were critical in moving U.S.-European relations forward.

Senator Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, provided an excellent overview of the status of EU-American relations. He talked extensively about the President's February trip to Europe and how the primary purpose was to bridge the misunderstandings with our long-time allies. While disagreements over the Iraq policy continue to dominate the transatlantic dialogue, he outlined a growing problem with Europe over continuing the weapons embargo against China. The United States wants the embargo to continue and the Europeans want it lifted.

John Bruton, EU Commission Ambassador to the United States, followed Lugar and discussed the critical role the EU played in transforming Ireland during his tenure as Prime Minister. While indicating Ireland had lagged behind the rest of "old Europe," its acceptance into the EU in 1972 propelled it to one of the most dominant economies in the region. He attributed this to Ireland's free access to critical markets as an EU member and how membership in the multi-national organization has diffused difficult issues with neighboring countries. He also mentioned how the EU is committed to a positive outcome in Iraq even if most member countries opposed the initial military engagement, and that a failure in Iraq now would be as devastating to the EU as it would be to the United States.

Ambassador Simonyi, the Hungarian Ambassador to the U.S. who graciously hosted REF's Budapest TAC last November, added that the transatlantic relationship is healthy but that Hungary must do a balancing act. He stressed Hungary's desire to be both a member of the EU and an ally of the United States, which was difficult during the Iraqi conflict. Hungary, he added, is also a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and therefore was an active member of the "coalition of the willing" because it was the right thing to do. The success of democracy in the Middle East is vital to all and NATO must continue to be the backbone of the transatlantic relationship. Ambassador Simonyi discussed the need for both "hard" (military) and "soft" (non-military) power in foreign relations. Unfortunately, he noted, the United States is perceived



*L to R: Jim Conzelman, COS to Cong.  
Mike Oxley, REF Chairman Ed  
Bethune, EU Ambassador John Bruton,  
Hungarian Ambassador András  
Simonyi, and Slovak Ambassador  
Rastislav Kacer.*

by many as wielding the hard power, while Europeans focus on soft power. This is not healthy, and the U.S. must highlight its use of soft power more (i.e., the \$15 billion of U.S. money to combat AIDs in Africa) while the Europeans must be willing to contribute militarily in certain instances.

Ambassador Kacer completed the speaking portion of the program by noting that prior to becoming the Ambassador to the U.S. he held the position of Slovakian Secretary of Defense. He, therefore, understood that an effective approach to foreign relations means a balanced integration of both hard and soft power. He also added that we live in a transatlantic relationship and all countries must work effectively together if we are to be successful.

The Ripon Educational Fund is a non-partisan, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that seeks to educate American public officials, academics, and corporate leaders about major foreign policy issues and facilitate the exchange of ideas among American and foreign government officials, scholars, corporate leaders, and other public policy experts. The group promotes enlightened, balanced and non-partisan international policy discussion and debate in the United States and abroad.

If you have any questions, please contact REF's President Terri Pazirandeh at (703) 536-4040 (tpazirandeh@riponfund.org). Thank you for your continued support.

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