



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CAPITOL HILL LAWMAKERS MEET TO DISCUSS POLICY ISSUES
WITH AMERICANS OF CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN
BACKGROUND**

WASHINGTON -- On Wednesday, October 5th, 2011, an association of 18 ethnic organizations representing more than 20 million Americans who trace their roots to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) returned to Capitol Hill to promote increased awareness among U.S. Members of Congress of a broad platform regarding the issues of greatest concern to CEE communities around the country.

The third "Advocacy Day" organized by the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC), together with representatives of its respective national communities, resulted in private meetings with 17 Members of Congress or their representatives.

These included staffers and four members of Senate Foreign Relations Committee – Dick Durbin (D-IL), Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), Bob Casey (D-PA), John Barrasso (R-WY) – as well as Senators Mark Kirk (R-IL), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Jon Kyl (R-AZ), and House Representatives including Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Todd Rokita (R-IN), Dan Benishek (R-MI), Albio Sires (D-NJ), Andy Harris (R-MD), John Shimkus (R-IL), and Mike Quigley (D-IL).

"By bundling democratic ideals with voting bloc strength and organizational credibility, these annual advocacy events allow our voices and hopes to be heard by some of those in our nation's Capitol who can best turn them into reality," said Barbara Andersen, Washington office director of the Polish American Congress, one of the founding CEEC organizations and the country's largest Polish American umbrella organization.

"In many ways, the CEEC is living proof of the power of reaching out to one's neighbors for mutual support and expertise," she added.

Andersen pointed out that, in dividing into five groups the participants were able to make sure to present the CEEC's message in a strong and clear voice to the selected Capitol Hill offices.

In doing so, she added, they were able to draw particular attention to issues affecting the Central and East European region, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law; Russia's undue influence over its neighbors and the region, in general and visa issues, with particular emphasis on expansion of the Visa Waiver Program.

The groups also focused on security – military, energy, cyber – and the perceived need for increased and consistent U.S. assistance to a region that just a generation ago suffered behind an Iron Curtain. (The most recent version of the CEEC's Policy Paper is available at: www.ceecoalition.us). In addition to sharing their concerns over these and other matters, the groups urged legislators to take specific actions both in Congress and in their relationships with the Executive Branch and government agencies.

The day ended with a debriefing session that allowed participants to share their impressions and feedback, followed by a reception at the historic Stewart R. Mott House on Capitol Hill.

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