

Jan Fisher: A Jewish President Outside of Israel?

A fascinating story is developing this week in the heart of Europe. The Czech Republic may become the first nation in Europe—indeed, the first country in the entire world with the exception of Israel itself—to elect a Jewish President. It's particularly fascinating given three facts:

- 1) Czechoslovakia was one of the first countries Hitler and the Nazis took over at the beginning of World War II, and one of the first places Jews were deported to the death camps.
- 2) **More than a quarter of a million Jews** who lived in the area of Czechoslovakia in 1938 were eventually murdered during the Holocaust and the rest of the war.
- 3) The post-Soviet era Czech Republic has become a strong friend of Israel—in fact, just last year the Czechs were **one of only nine countries** to vote against a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state.

“If the pundits are correct, the Czech Republic may become the first country other than Israel to elect a Jewish president,” **reports the Times of Israel**. “Jan Fischer, 62, an understated former prime minister who led a caretaker government following a coalition collapse in 2009, is neck-and-neck in the polls with another former government head as the nation holds its first round of presidential elections on Friday and Saturday.

The two front-runners advance to a runoff, and political prognosticators are predicting that Fischer will reach the second round. ‘He’s like our Joe Lieberman,’ said Tomas Kraus, chairman of the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities, referring to the failed US vice presidential candidate. ‘Whether or not you support him, you can’t help but be proud he has come this far....’”

“His upbringing is a case study of post-World War II Jewish life in Central Europe. His father survived Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps, and his mother was Catholic. He celebrated Czech Christmas and attended synagogue,” notes the *Times*.

“My father brought me to the synagogue for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah and Purim,” Fischer said. “During Pesach, we didn’t organize a seder, but we did have matzah. Father was a member of the Jewish community until the end of the 1950s. That changed once Czechoslovak Communist leaders became more virulently anti-religious; Judaism was no longer high on his family’s list of priorities. It changed again—as it did for many of Fischer’s generation—when his son began to discover his Jewish roots....”

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