

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
News and Information Bureau

**PRESS BRIEFING OF PCO ASSISTANT SECRETARY WHENG HIDALGO-OTIDA
WITH DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS-OFFICE OF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY MARIA ELENA P. ALGABRE
MARCH 8, 2024 [10:57 A.M. – 11:17 A.M.]**

PCO ASEC. HIDALGO-OTIDA: Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome sa ating pre-departure briefing ngayong Biyernes, March 8, 2024.

Sa susunod na linggo, tutungo si Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. sa Germany para sa isang working visit at sa Czech Republic naman para sa isang state visit sa imbitasyon nina German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at Czech President Petr Pavel. Makikipagpulong si Pangulong Marcos sa mga lider ng Germany at Czech Republic at maging sa business communities doon. Bukod sa mga meeting na ito, magkakaroon din ng pagkakataon ang pangulo na bisitahin ang Filipino communities sa dalawang bansa.

Kasama natin ngayon si Department of Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Maria Elena Algabre ng Office of European Affairs para bigyan pa tayo ng detalye sa mga magiging aktibidad ng Pangulo. Good morning, Asec. Algabre. Welcome po.

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Good morning. Maraming salamat sa iyo at magandang umaga rin po sa mga friends natin sa DFA and Malacañang Press Corps. If I can just deliver a short remark on the visit.

It is indeed our pleasure from the Department of Foreign Affairs to brief you today on the upcoming visit of the President to Germany and to Czech Republic. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and First Lady Maria Louise Araneta Marcos, upon the invitation of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the Czech President Petr Pavel will undertake a working visit to Germany on 12 to 13 March, 2024 and a state visit to the Czech Republic on 14 to 15 March 2024.

The President will meet with the head of state and heads of government in Germany and the Czech Republic. He will be welcomed by the German chancellor, as I said, Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and by the Czech President Petr Pavel and Prime Minister Petr Fiala who visited the Philippines last year. The President will also meet with the heads of the Czech Republic ... with the other high officials of the Czech Republic, if I may correct myself, these are the heads of the Czech parliament – the Senate President Miloš Vystrčil and the president of the Chamber of Deputies Markéta Pekarová Adamová or in short, the Speaker.

The President's trip to the two central European countries follows the visit to Manila of Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala in April 2023 and the German Federal Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in January 2024, and this endeavor seeks to strengthen bilateral relations and foster increased cooperation with the two countries.

During the President's time in Germany and the Czech Republic, the President will focus on bolstering trade and investment opportunities in the Philippines, inviting German and Czech companies to increase their presence in the country.

The President will also attend business forums in both countries participated in by prominent business leaders. He will then meet with major companies intending to take advantage of the Philippines' continuing impressive economic performance and conducive economic investment environment. During these business forums, partnership agreements will also be signed.

In Germany, in terms of government-to-government agreements, there will be a Joint Declaration of Intent on strengthening cooperation in maritime sector which will be signed by both countries' transportation agencies. This JDI seeks to facilitate maritime trade and mobility of Philippine and German-owned commercial vessels.

Also in Germany, there will be a signing of the cooperation program between the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training – BIBB, I think that's an acronym in the German language. The cooperation program seeks to continue TESDA and BIBB's partnership on technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

In the Czech Republic, we will sign a joint communique on the establishment of a labor consultations mechanism which aims to enhance cooperation between the Philippines and the Czech Republic for the safe and orderly migration of Filipino workers, as well as for the provision of higher protection of their rights and welfare. There are also other agreements in the pipeline that we are closely working on with the Czech side.

Then, the President will also have the opportunity to meet with the Filipino communities living in Germany and the Czech Republic to personally share his administration's plans and programs for the OFWs and reaffirm the Philippine government's agenda and commitment to supporting them wherever they are.

Our bilateral relations between the Philippines and the Czech Republic were established on October 1973 so we are celebrating 50 years of bilateral relations. This year also, we will commemorate 70 years of bilateral relations with Germany which were established on 8 October 1954.

Thank you very much.

PCO ASEC. HIDALGO: Okay. The floor is open for questions. Maricel Halili, TV-5.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Hi, ma'am. Magandang umaga po. Ma'am, you mentioned earlier na mayroong labor cooperation agreement that will be signed sa Czech Republic. May we know gaano kalaki iyong labor forces na Filipino na naka-base sa Czech and ano ba iyong condition nila? Why is there a need for additional protection?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Thank you po. For the Czech Republic, we will sign a joint communique on bilateral agreement, bilateral labor agreement. There are at present, approximately seven thousand Filipinos in the Czech Republic and the Czech Republic has expressed his interest to encourage more Filipinos to participate in the labor market. In fact, they have announced a yearly quota for Filipinos starting this May of ten thousand Filipinos who may enter the Czech Republic for work.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: And, may we know what particular jobs will be available?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: This will be in different types of jobs – skilled and professional work.

PCO ASEC. HIDALGO: Harley Valbuena...

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Hello, good morning po. The President has been active in raising the West Philippine issue during his recent trip to Australia. So, will he do the same on his trip to Germany and the Czech Republic?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Thank you. The visit to Germany and the Czech Republic also stems from the fact that these are countries that are like-minded. We share values for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – including in the promotion of an open, inclusive, international rules-based order.

Yes, the President will have an exchange on how both could work together in maintaining an international rules-based order. And if some of you may have noticed in the recent incident in the West Philippine Sea, the German Ambassador and the Czech Ambassador issued a statement of support for the Philippines and they are concerned in what's happening in the area.

PCO ASEC. HIDALGO: Ivan Mayrina, GMA-7...

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA-7: In relation to that, ma'am, do we expect also a defense cooperation agreement to be signed during this visit?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Thank you po. For Germany, we already have a defense cooperation agreement. It is primarily... it was signed in 1974 if I may but it focused initially on training of our armed forces. So now, we would like to convey our interest to expand the cooperation. With the Czech Republic, we are also exploring/discussing with them on how we can also expand cooperation in areas including defense.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Nabanggit ninyo rin po na magkakaroon ng agreement related to the maritime sector between the Philippines and Germany. How is this expected to benefit the Filipino seafarers, especially those in European-owned vessels?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Okay, maraming salamat po. On the agreement itself, this is more on the commercial side, so facilitating the movement of maritime trade. And you know very well that one-third of the seafarers around the world are Filipinos, and a robust shipping industry in the Philippines and in worldwide will be good for the employment of seafarers – Filipino seafarers. Maraming salamat po.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Ma'am, may we know who will join the President on his trip to Germany and the Czech Republic?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: For the visit to Germany and the Czech Republic, the President, aside from Madam, the First Lady, he will be joined by key Cabinet officials – the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Enrique Manalo; Secretary of Trade, Secretary Pascual; the Speaker of the House; and the Senate President; Secretary Tiu Laurel; OIC Hans Cacdac of DMW; and PCO Secretary Garafil to name a few.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Hi, ma'am. Good morning po. Ma'am, how many business deals do we expect to be signed on this trip of the President?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: On the business deal, I would rather leave that to our colleague from the Department of Trade and Industry, and I also rather would like to be surprised kasi we're also finalizing our arrangements on the business meeting. And as I said, let us be surprised after the visit on what we can announce to you – pleasantly surprised.

JEAN MANGALUZ/[INQUIRER.NET](https://www.inquirer.net): Hi! Good morning. Can you brief us what's happening, what's the situation in the Czech Republic that demands such a high volume of Filipino workers?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Thank you. Well, the Filipino workers everywhere, whenever we talk especially from our counterparts in Europe, they really appreciate the work ethic of our countrymen, and their talent and skills – so that's one. So they do get a premium in terms of recruitment and benefits.

And as far as Europe is concerned, Europe has a problem with its population. A lot of them have a shortage in their working population. And some of them, they have been a boom, say, in the tourism industry, and they know that our skills even in our, you know, our hospitable nature, in our very pleasant attitude at work – lagi tayong nakangiti. So particularly, say, in the tourism industry, they would like us to be there. But that's only for tourism, but I said, there are also opportunities for our countrymen in other sectors, in other industries because we are known for our skilled workforce.

JEAN MANGALUZ/[INQUIRER.NET](https://www.inquirer.net): Quick follow-up: Is the 10K quota in effect now or would it be sealed during the President's visit?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: They have already announced it. There is already a decision. Actually, starting January 2024, the quota is 5,000. And the Czech, they have announced that this will be increased beginning May to 10,000 for the Filipinos only.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Ma'am, the President has been receiving much criticism over the frequency of his foreign visits, particularly itong visit na ito will happen just a few days after he returned from two visits, two separate visits sa Australia. Ma'am, can you talk to the Filipino people and tell them in a nutshell what is the, parang, what does the Philippines stand to gain from these two particular trips?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Okay, thank you. The President's international engagement is, of course, in support of his development agenda, security, economic that will redound to the benefits of our countrymen. And for Germany and the Czech Republic, the visit will focus, as we have said earlier, in strengthening partnership with like-minded countries in Europe, especially the promotion of a rules-based international order.

We will also wish to expand economic cooperation with Germany to explore other avenues of cooperation, and the same with the Czech Republic.

For both, we will enhance labor cooperation. You know very well that we have an agreement with Germany on health workers that has been in place – the Triple Win Program. And now, we are in discussions with them on the entry also of our Filipino countrymen in other professions and skilled work. And we've mentioned earlier the one with the Czech Republic.

And lastly, we would like to increase people-to-people exchanges because we have in Germany a huge Filipino community – 36,000 Filipino; and in the Czech Republic, the 7,000 that is there is expected to grow also.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: So, ma'am, in short, ito pong trips na ito, you believe that these trips are necessary at this point in time and this cleans out the waste of government expenses, kasi iyan po ang sentiment kasi ng public?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: No, hindi po. These trips are all in support of the President's development agenda for the wellbeing of our country and the progress of the Filipinos. Thank you po.

ANALY SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Ma'am, good morning. You made mention na may meeting si President with business leaders in Germany and Czech. May we know po kung mayroon na, what companies and what business they would intend to invest in the Philippines?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: There are meetings with the companies that are interested in renewable energy, in manufacturing, healthcare, aerospace and innovation.

ANALY SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: So, ma'am, bukod po doon sa health care workers, ano po iyong sunod na malaking bilang ng mga professions ng mga Pilipino doon sa Germany at saka Czech Republic?

DFA ASEC. ALGABRE: Sa Germany po, iba-iba iyong kanilang mga ... aside from the health workers, mayroon sa mga IT, sa manufacturing also and, of course, we have those who have made Germany their home. Nagpunta doon, they met their family, they build their family there. Some are students also.

PCO ASEC. HIDALGO-OTIDA: Okay? So okay na po tayo, Malacañang Press Corps? So iyan po ang nakalatag na trabaho nina Pangulong Marcos at ng Philippine delegation sa Germany at sa Czech Republic sa susunod na linggo.

Maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps, at Happy International Women's Day sa lahat ng wonderful women dito. Thank you, ma'am.

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