

special
issue

1989
2019



Jan Sokol

Today we know how
to handle freedom

/ 4

Spotlight

A journey into the
world of knowledge

/ 6

Václav Havel

From prison to
honorary doctorate

/ 10

Vladimír Hanzel

How Havel turned
into a Leader

/ 14

Šimon Pánek

Our first and last
demonstration

/ 18

4EU+

Echoes from
partners

/ 20

Join us in commemorating the events of **November 17** 1939/1989

12/11

17:00 Patriotic Hall, the Carolinum
Three Decades of Democracy: A Debate Between Former Czech Prime Ministers

13/11

12:00 First Faculty of Medicine at Charles University / General University Hospital
A gathering to honour the memory of student Jan Opletal

18:00 Faculty of Law
Faculty Night

14/11

10:00 the Carolinum / Kampus Hybernská
Conference on dissent in the former Czechoslovakia, followed by a concert

16:00 Carolinum
Opening of the exhibition Our November '89

15/11

9:00 University of Economics, Prague
Conference on Economic Transformation in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

19:00 Grand Hall, the Carolinum
Unknown Soldier – an original musical

16/11

12:00 Patriotic Hall, the Carolinum
Conference on Europe and International Students' Day

16:00 Albertov
The Night Before Velvet concert

17/11

9:00 Albertov
Freedom and Democracy Day at Albertov

9:00 The Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic
From Barbed Wire Fences to the Schengen Area conference



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Dear readers,

It has been 30 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain. In the Czech Republic, this event is known as the Velvet Revolution. November 17, 1989, marked the start of a new era – one of freedom and fundamental changes. However, the date has a much darker history.

On October 28, 1939, the anniversary of the founding of our country (at a time when it was occupied by the Nazis) citizens and students of Charles University gathered for a peaceful demonstration; however, the student Jan Opletal was shot and later succumbed to his injuries. On November 15, his funeral turned into a demonstration and two days later all Czech universities were closed. Nine students and professors were executed on November 17 and more than 1,200 students and professors were sent to the concentration camp in Sachsenhausen, Germany. In their memory, International Students' Day was established in London in 1941.

Fifty years later, November 17, 1989, saw the start of the Velvet Revolution that brought down the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Students had gathered to mark the day and commemorate Opletal's death and suffered a brutal crackdown at the hands of the communist riot police. The crack-



Photo by Charles University Archive

down shocked the country and led to demonstrations that would never abate and would eventually bring down the regime.

That moment – *the moment* Czechoslovaks regained their freedom and put the country back on the path to democracy – is still a reason to celebrate. Given the extent of the social, economic, and political transformation since, the 30th anniversary presents an important opportunity to evaluate how far the country has come; it is also a moment to address some of the challenges ahead.

We report the latest about the 4EU+ Alliance, bringing together the talents and resources of six prestigious European universities. The future offers numerous challenges and education is very often one of the main ways in which we can solve problems together. The 4EU+ Alliance is a key project for our university, aimed at bringing more students and more researchers together: it represents our vision of a free and cooperating Europe.

May we all enjoy this anniversary, remembering the courageous students who gave their lives for our freedom, and work together for a better future.

Tomáš Zima

Rector of Charles University



You can read the articles online too!

Contents



6

Forum 4/2019
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18



Interview

JAN SOKOL – Today we know how to handle freedom /4

Spotlight

A journey into the world of knowledge /6

Profile

VÁCLAV HAVEL – From prison to honorary doctorate /10

Interview

VLADIMÍR HANZEL – How Václav Havel turned into a Leader /14

Emeritus

Out of shadows and injustice into the free world /16

Interview

ŠIMON PÁNEK – Our first and last demonstration /18

4EU+ Alliance

The Velvet Revolution... as seen by our 4EU+ Alliance partners /20

Comics

How to explain the meaning of “Velvet” to your foreign friends /22



10

Today we know how to handle freedom

Professor Jan Sokol's philosophy lectures have always been among the most sought-after at Charles University, and he himself has been connected to academia for decades. He also perceptively noted the transformation of the university and all of Czech society after the events of November 1989.

STORY BY Jiří Novák PHOTO BY Vladimír Šigut

From today's perspective it seems that people were very united in 1989, and they held together with a fair amount of enthusiasm.

This is always something of a dangerous optical illusion. Even though half a million people gathered on Letná plain, it's still a small figure – five percent of the population. You have to watch out for this illusion – that we're "all for one". Yes, a significant portion of citizens wanted freedom, but not all.

When were you approached to be actively involved in the events of the time?

I had helped with something a couple of times, and after New Year's I was working at the magazine *Přítomnost* [Presence] with Petr Pithart. Only before the elections (*Editor's note: which took place in June 1990*) did my colleagues come to me to say that I had to run for office be-

I would have easily overlooked all the pettiness and gaffes, but I'm bothered by Zeman's courtship of Russia and China. That's a serious and dangerous thing.

cause there were too many communists on the Civic Forum's candidate list.

In the end, you spent two years as a member of parliament, and in 2003 you were even a candidate for president. How did that happen?

Representatives of the Social Democrats came to the faculty to ask me if I'd be willing to run. At the time I was the dean of a new faculty and I had the feeling that a person could do more there than at Prague Castle. Nevertheless, I felt a kind of social responsibility not to refuse such an offer. And I also didn't want Václav Klaus to win. I knew him from before, and although I have a certain respect for him, I didn't think he would make a good president.

In the end, Klaus won. What is your evaluation of his presidency?

I am not here to throw dirt on presidents, but I have the feeling that it's gone to the dogs. Of course Václav Havel's personality would be hard to measure up to, but Václav Klaus understood it as being that he had to disparage Havel's legacy, which seemed rather stupid. And his tug-of-war with the European Union was embarrassing. It damaged us a lot.

As for the rest, the foreign policy of our last couple of presidents has been very strange. Klaus and Miloš Zeman

have pretty much wasted the prestige we had abroad thanks to Havel. I would have easily overlooked all the pettiness and gaffes, but I'm bothered by Zeman's courtship of Russia and China. That's a serious and dangerous thing.

Is it President Zeman who is polarising Czech society?

Yes, and I think he consciously supports it. And the personal assaults on people outside politics, on judges or journalists that the Castle trots out from time to time, that's certainly not the role of a president.

Is Czech society really divided into "Prague café society" and everyone else, as Zeman claims?

"Prague café society" is a typical cliché and more than enough people imagine snobs who don't do anything. There's a distaste for education hidden behind it. With these diatribes, Miloš Zeman encourages and attracts the truly non-educated, who have complexes about these things. Hence the resistance to education as such, which today is quite a dangerous thing.

How else has society changed since 1989?

Aside from the immensely essential factual changes, I'm pleased with how

society has miraculously learned to handle freedom. I've always been very concerned about that. Of course one greatly looked forward to when the bubble would burst. But at the same time I was worried how we would handle it because we weren't used to freedom.

And do we know how to handle freedom, or do we no longer appreciate it?

You know, I'm not a sociologist, and I have no idea how it's perceived on a mass scale. But I'd say that if public freedom is taken for granted among people, that's actually good. That's how it should be. And if anyone tries to cut their freedom short, let the people protest loudly.

This is why I'm delighted, for example, by "Milion chvilék pro demokracii [A Million Moments for Democracy]", where young people figure prominently, unaffected by old sentiments. They understood that there's no need to establish a new party or present a political programme. It's enough to show that they're here. And if the government does something unacceptable, it'll growl a bit in disagreement. Even that may be enough.

Could you name what has surprised you the most in a positive and negative sense over the past thirty years?

For me the most striking manifestation of changes for the good would be how our cities look, how the houses, factories and stores look – how the environment we normally live in looks. The difference is huge and very significant.

What's negative is probably the constant desire to gripe. I realised that many of my friends, including dissidents, think that their role is to constantly criticise something.

For many years you taught and lectured at the university. You were the education minister. What's the state of Czech education?

Education responds very sensitively to society around it. Teachers and headmasters have been given more leeway in recent years, and this of course is good. But on the other hand – the idea of education has been very differentiated, and it's difficult to agree on something.

Take a little thing like math on the high school leaving exams. Although the subject is not popular, it's essential for

graduation, and for everyone. Of course it's a little different at a conservatory or at a secondary medical school than at a *gymnázium* [college preparatory secondary school]. After all, neither a musician nor a nurse can get by without a trinomial equation (pardon me, without an equation with one unknown), without percentages and statistics, without estimating quantities.

What's troubling contemporary education?

Above all, it's the bureaucratisation and unnecessary recordkeeping of anything and everything. And I'm very disturbed by the mistrust shown by parents: they themselves are showing children that they don't appreciate schools. When a father asks his little boy what he did in the "idiot factory" today, he has no idea how much he's harming him. It's interesting that most people will have incredibly good memories of their first teacher until the day they die. Why can't we use that later? Where does it go?

Maybe the teacher himself should understand his authority a little differently. It's similar to when you're a parent – your children think you know everything until five or six years old. But then you have to show that you too don't know things, otherwise you lose your authority.

For the last three decades you've been connected in various ways with Charles University. What has changed the most?

I would say that the universities were significantly changed by the masses. The number of students grew in the West over many years, while in the Czech Republic it jumped from one year to the next and practically without investment. Also, the emphasis on research and examination, which the Communists wanted to give exclusively to the Academy of Sciences. It came all of a sudden, and things are now evaluated only according to the criteria of empirical science.

A university is a remarkable organism that has been alive for nearly a thousand years though transformations. It is conservative in itself and by its nature. At the same time, young people are constantly entering it, and thanks to that it can be a very open and critical environment. And that's good.



Prof. PhDr. Jan Sokol, Ph.D., CSc. Since 1991 he has lectured in philosophy, anthropology and religious studies at the Pedagogical Faculty and Faculty of Arts at Charles University, and since 2000 at the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University. Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University (2000–2007), Gold Medal of Charles University (2016), Order of the Legion of Honour (2008).

From 1990 to 1992 he was a member of the Federal Assembly for the Civic Forum; from 1997 to 2011 he was an advisor to the Czech minister of education, and was minister of education from January to July 1998. In 2003, he lost in the presidential election to Václav Klaus.



Students at a rally in the Albertov district, Prague 1989.

A journey into the world of knowledge

The events of November 1989 brought about a number of changes at Charles University. The foundations of a free and proud university, upon which Prague's education stands to this day, had to be built in just a few months.

STORY BY Lucie Kettnerová, Martin Rychlík PHOTOS BY Jakub Langhammer, Charles University archive

During the November strikes, the leadership of the faculties behaved in different ways toward the students. The dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics supported the students, the dean of the Faculty of Arts stood against them and the dean of the Faculty of Education even issued a ban on “posting any materials on Faculty premises, including the access path in front of the Faculty”.

University rector Zdeněk Češka decided to resign at the beginning of December under pressure from the student and civic movements. At the faculties, a preparatory academic council was created to bring together students, teachers and employees; they sent four representatives – two students and two teachers – to select a new rector. The election took place on 19 January 1990 between two candidates – Zdeněk Lojda, a professor of pathological anatomy at the Faculty of General Medicine, and Associate Professor Radim Palouš – and Palouš was chosen as rector. Following his proposal, on 26 January the Academic Council elected five vice-rectors.

The university gets back on its feet

A number of difficult tasks awaited Charles University's new leadership. A free academic life had to be created from scratch and a sense of belonging began to be built. The role of the university at the time was quite negligible because before 1989 the faculties had considerable powers. The professional level in many fields, especially the humanities and social sciences, was poor and research activities at a number of workplaces were largely neglected.

Other personnel issues also had to be resolved. The university sought to quickly purge institutions and teachers tied to the totalitarian regime – it abolished the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and rehabilitated unjustly persecuted students, teachers and employees.

Prague education also had to regain its position in the international university community, which was very accommodating to representatives of the oldest university in Central Europe.

“In 1990, a world rectors' conference was held in Helsinki with more than 500 participants, and Charles University was

honoured with the first place alongside the Finnish rector who organised the event,” recalled Radim Palouš, the first post-November rector 10 years ago, for Forum. The university was also viewed positively at dozens of other universities around the world. “It was enough to say, ‘I never guessed, never dreamed I'd see you face to face’ and I, a representative of a university that until recently was cursed behind the Iron Curtain, was immediately welcomed,” he added. Palouš, along with Czech Technical University Rector Stanislav Hanzl, were at the creation of the Rectors' Club of Czechoslovakia, later renamed according to international convention to the Conference of Rectors of the Czech Republic.

Property returns to universities

From the very beginning, the Prague university owned dormitories and faculty buildings. But a fundamental change came with the Higher Education Act of 1950: university buildings and student club property were nationalised and the universities became users only. The property, including real estate, was ↪



A very long and bright history. "We have had this charter drafted and ordered that it be confirmed by the seal of our Majesty. Done in Prague, on the Seventh Day of the Month of April of the Year of Our Lord Thirteen Hundred and Forty-Eight, in the second year of our rule (King Charles IV)," states the Foundation Charter of the Charles University.

returned to universities after an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1998.

In the 1990s, the university was forced to leave a total of 12 buildings due to restitution (for example in Prague, buildings on Dlouhá, Řeznická and Černá streets, the Svatava villa, the Lobkovic chateau in Neratovice, a building in Hradec Králové – Třebeš and a building of the deanery in Plzeň). On the other hand, it managed to gain the area of the former College of Political Science of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in Prague 6, the so-called Sorbonne in Vokovice. Today it is the location of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, which until then had previously operated in the Tyrš House in Malá Strana.

The university acquired other buildings through purchase, such as a building on Černá street, buildings in Jinonice and the deanery of the Faculty of Medicine in Plzeň. The university also cared for smaller buildings as well, such as greenhouses in the Botanical Garden of the Faculty of Science at Na Slupi, an animal facility in the hospital area on Karlovo náměstí and a laboratory on Viničná street. A number of sports facilities have also been rebuilt.

A reconstruction was also carried out at the Carolinum on the occasion of the university's 650th anniversary. The modernisation focused on the techni-

cal safeguarding of the building and the establishment of barrier-free access to the first floor; in the basement areas a permanent exhibition of the university's history was installed, the new Emperor's Hall was added to the building's ground floor, and several Carolinum monuments were restored.

More varied, open and modern

The atmosphere at the university changed significantly and today, with 17 different faculties, Charles University draws far more international researchers and students. The number of foreign students increased tenfold over three decades, going from just 913 in 1989 to more than 9,000 today! They bring new ideas, a fresh outlook and a cosmopolitan approach that we could only dream of during the turbulent days of the Velvet Revolution. Thanks in large part to investment and EU structural funds, the school laid the foundation for new infrastructure, including new laboratories, serving not only Charles University but society as a whole.



1989

Number of students in 1989

21,091

Number of foreigners studying at Charles University in 1989

913

2019

Number of students in 2018

48,475

Number of foreigners studying at Charles University in 2019

9,094



Modern Facilities are attractive for Scientists

Charles University prides itself as a research university emphasising excellence in science. Over the last several years for example, CU opened new state-of-the-art facilities at faculties in Plzeň and Hradec Králové. Charles University, together with the Czech Academy of Sciences, is now a leader in basic research, ranking higher than any other Czech university on the prestigious Nature Index, measuring publication output in top scientific journals.

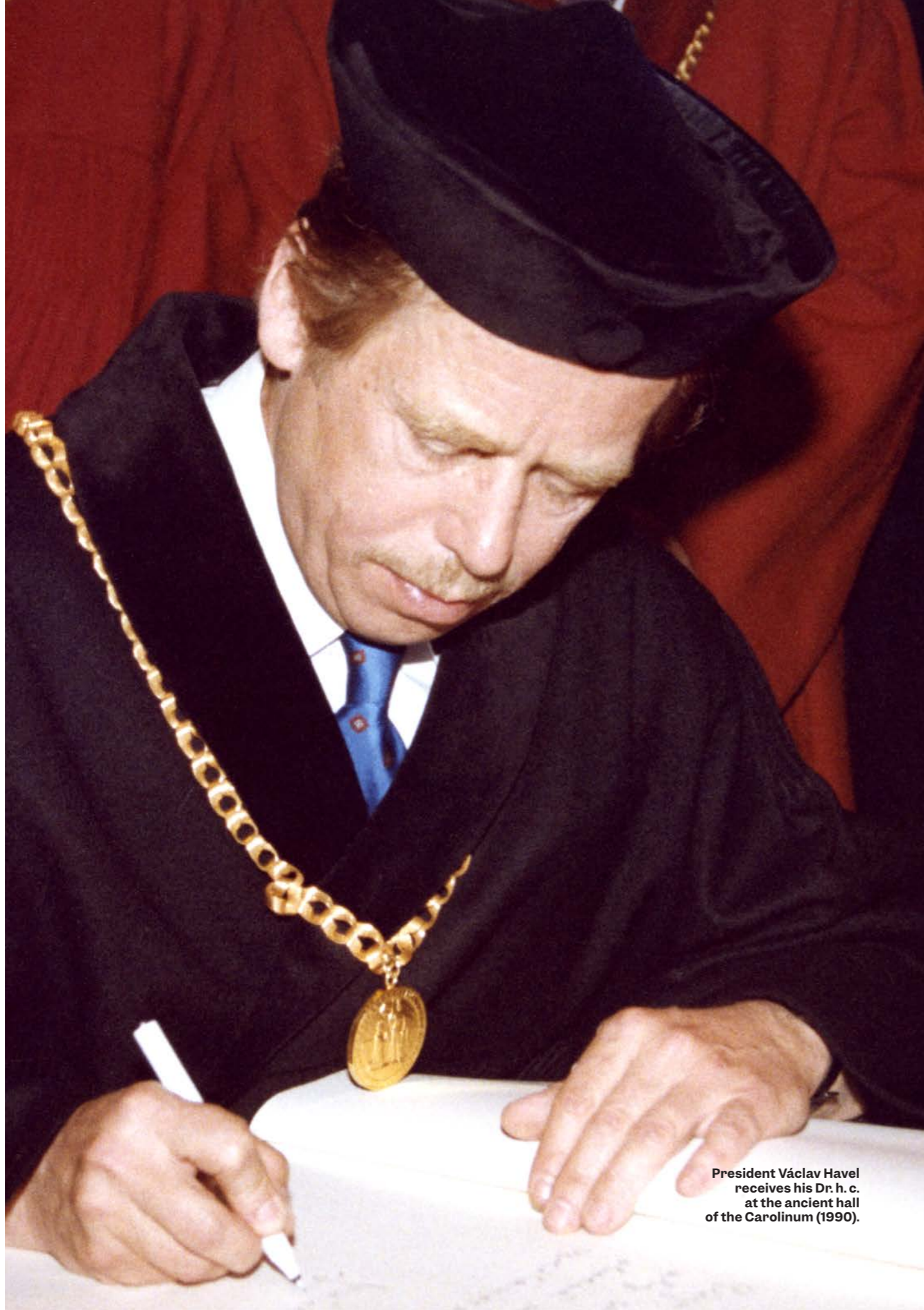
Now there are 17 faculties

1990 brought a change in the names of the Prague medical faculties resulting from significant changes in their focus. According to the new faculty statutes, they use the following names: 1st Faculty of Medicine (formerly the Faculty of General Medicine), the 2nd Faculty of Medicine (formerly the Faculty of Pediatrics) and the 3rd Faculty of Medicine (formerly the Faculty of Hygiene).

The new Higher Education Act of May 1990 confirmed the incorporation of the theological faculties as part of Charles University. The ceremonial admission of all three faculties to the university took place on 24 September 1990 at the Carolinum.

After a series of negotiations, the Faculty of Journalism was closed in May 1990, and the Faculty of Social Sciences was established in its place.

The Faculty of Humanities, founded on 1 August 2000 from the Institute of Liberal Arts and Humanities (IZV), is the university's youngest faculty.



President Václav Havel receives his Dr. h. c. at the ancient hall of the Carolinum (1990).

Václav Havel: From prison to honorary doctorate

In November and December 1989, students visited Václav Havel in his flat on the former Engels (now Rašín) riverfront, or went to see him at the Laterna Magika theatre, the headquarters of the Civic Forum. Havel visited the university a couple of months later as the president of Czechoslovakia.

TEXT BY **Lucie Kettnerová** PHOTOS BY **Charles University archive**

Václav Havel visited Charles University on a number of occasions since 1990, whether it was a student meeting at the Faculty of Arts or Law, or as part of lectures he prepared in the academic year 1999/2000 for the Institute of International Studies of the Faculty of Social Sciences. There were 12 of these lectures, and they were intended for doctoral students and advanced master's students. In them, Havel considered key issues of Czechoslovak and Czech foreign policy between 1989 and 1999.

The last time he visited the Carolinum was in November 2009, to present an honorary doctorate to his friend Adam Michnik. Spontaneous, long and sincere applause greeted him when he was introduced at the beginning of the ceremony.

Doctor honoris causa

The title of honorary doctorate (doctor honoris causa) has been awarded by the university with the agreement of the ruler as a certain type of honor since the early 19th century. It is awarded to prominent personalities in scientific, cultural, political and social life during public graduations in the Grand Assembly Hall of the Carolinum.

After 1948, the honorary doctorate somewhat lost its value because it was awarded to political figures who visited Prague. It regained its dignity and respect after 1990. Václav Havel was the first person to receive it at the free Charles University. He appeared before a crowded Grand Assembly Hall with the other recipients and gave a short speech, which in his case was very personal.



in memory of VH

Student scholarship

The Václav Havel scholarship is intended for both foreign students and people for whom the repression of totalitarian, authoritarian and unfree regimes anywhere in the world makes it difficult or even impossible to study. In 2019, an Azerbaijani student was the recipient of the scholarship.

Master's specialisation

In 2013, Charles University ceremonially named its master's specialisation after Václav Havel. The program was developed in cooperation with universities in Oxford, Paris and Leiden, and is guaranteed by EUROPAEUM, an association of prestigious European universities.

"In Václav Havel we see a person who was guided his entire life by strong moral and virtuous principles. And he was not only an excellent playwright, but also a great politician. That is why we decided to name this specialisation of European studies after him," said Václav Hampl, the rector of Charles University at the time.

Book editions

The Václav Havel Editions, which is part of the Carolinum publishing house, builds on the intellectual activity of the philosopher, playwright, dissident and president whose name it bears. The role of the editions is to present various perspectives on the world around us from leading figures. One of the latest publications, "Filosofie en noir" by Miroslav Petříček, received the Jaroslav Seifert Prize this year.



First Lady Olga Havlová beside her husband, former dissident Havel.

Dear Rector, my dear friend Radim Palouš, esteemed guests,

All my youth I dreamed in vain of becoming a student at this most famous Czech university. My mother, to the end of her days, dreamed that I would get a doctorate here. God, or destiny, or history wanted me to be a doctor here, even if I didn't properly study here, and it's been several years since my mother passed away. If there is a heaven – and you dear Radim, have no doubt that it exists – then my mother is having one of the most joyous days of her heavenly life. It's probably more joyous than 29 December of last year, when I became the president of this country. On that day, on the contrary, it was probably my father, who – like all men – knew and honoured the gravitas of public office.

...

Our rebellion against violence and totalitarianism was guided from the very first moment by the idea of truth and love. That same idea is inseparably linked with this university. Was it not its most famous rector, Master Jan Hus, who had himself burned at the stake rather than give up his truth?

If today philosophers go straight into the lecture halls and academic functions of this famed university from the underground and police cells where they suffered for their truth, they only dignify the moral tradition that made this university famous.

Please allow me, distinguished guests, to conclude my remarks by expressing my great desire and my great hope. Indeed, the desire and hope that the state, which was founded by a philosopher and which we are starting to build again today, will be a truly spiritual state, a state which philosophers are again helping to rebirth, a state that does not stand on ideological foundations but on moral and spiritual foundations. If we succeed in building such a state, we will be repaying the world a great debt created by our long-term passivity. This installment will be the inspiration we give it. Let us try to indicate to everyone around us that the dangers of planetary apocalypse today can only be faced in one way, which is a war of spirit, responsibility, tolerance and kindness against brute force, violence and the cult of material interests.

Our state will inspire others if we ourselves are inspired. Inspiring it is the task of scholars and therefore of this university.

It is a great honour for me and a great obligation that I may continue to consider myself as part of it as a bearer of its honorary doctorate.

Václav
Havel
Dr. h. c.

30/5/1990

How Václav Havel turned into a Leader

For thirty years, Vladimír Hanzel was Václav Havel's personal secretary, including his entire term as president. They met in 1986, brought together by a shared love of music. They also lived through the turbulent days of November 1989 together, which Hanzel recalled.

STORY BY Jiří Novák, Martin Rychlík PHOTO BY Vladimír Šigut

How did you experience 17 November 1989?

Václav Havel intentionally remained at his cottage at Hrádeček because he didn't want to be "preventively" arrested again, and he asked me to report on the situation. I'd planned on it anyway, so I went to the student demonstration on Albertov Street.

Could you feel a different atmosphere among people at the time?

Certainly. If only because so many more people came. Older people were there along with the students. Some had banners that were bold for the time, and various speakers addressed the crowd at Albertov. For example, the academic Miroslav Katětov (*Editor's note: Charles University rector from 1953–1957*) gave a scathing speech, as did the math and physics student Martin Klíma and others. A representative of the *svazáks* [the Czechoslovak Socialist Union of Youth], gave a speech full of phrases and he was whistled off the stage.

The march went to Vyšehrad, to the grave of Karel Hynek Mácha, but then it went to the city centre.

When people were leaving for the metro, the then-activist John Bok got up on a wall and shouted: "Don't be cowards! We're going to Wenceslas Square!" He diverted part of the people who

were coming down from Vyšehrad. We reached Vyšehradská Street, and a police cordon was standing there. Members of Public Security [the police] blocked the way to Karlovo náměstí and called on us to disperse. But those behind us had no idea of what was going on at the front of the march, and they pushed us forward. The SNBs [the National Security Corps] got an order and started beating indiscriminately. Really brutally.

How did people in the march react to that?

By then there was a more militant atmosphere, and people just didn't let themselves get passively beaten. One cop had his baton stripped from him when he rushed into the crowd; another had his helmet knocked off. I ran with other people to the nearest building and we only went out after a while, after things calmed down. Meanwhile, the march went along a different route, down the Vltava riverbank, and it kept growing as passers-by joined. The atmosphere was completely unusual at the time, and people were shouting slogans against the leaders of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

As we passed the National Theatre and approached the Máj department store, we could see in the distance a wall of armoured police vehicles. Police-men used a loudspeaker to call for us to

disperse. Suddenly a cordon appeared from the other side, behind our backs. It moved forward slowly. We were surrounded and were being squeezed more and more into a small space.

Were you there until the end?

I was there until about half past eight. At nine I was supposed to call Václav Havel at home. As soon as I got home, the phone rang. I described to Václav everything that happened. We still had no idea of the brutal crackdown. We found out about that later.

How long did it take for the two of you to see each other in person?

The next day, as we'd agreed. Václav came to Prague and in the evening we went to the theatre, where a theatrical collage that included part of Havel's play, *The Garden Party*, was supposed to be performed. But a few hours earlier, the theatres decided they would join the strike.

At the time, speculation swarmed about the death of the student Martin Šmíd.

Yes, it was a complicated time and various whispers were going around – for example about several dead who were secretly taken God knows where and their bodies secretly cremated and so on. The situation was unclear. On top of

all that, Michael Žantovský, who worked for Reuters, came into the theatre saying that the student Martin Šmíd had been killed. But his mother, Jana Šmídová, was also in the theatre, and she told us it was nonsense, that Martin was sleeping at home. But there was another Martin Šmíd (*Editor's note: He wasn't among the victims either; nevertheless, this rumor accelerated the situation*).

Did Václav Havel meet with the students before the revolution?

Students came to Havel's apartment often, and after the events of November, of course, contacts greatly intensified at the headquarters of the Civic Forum (OF). Havel himself demanded that he take part in the negotiations with the government at the time, as well as internal meetings of OF. It was important that we pull together.

Among the student leaders at the time, who stood out the most?

Martin Mejstřík from DAMU [the Academy of Musical Arts' Theatre Faculty] was very revolutionary, and Šimon Pánek (*a student from the Faculty of Science at Charles University*) was more moderate, but at the same time he was also bold. Martin Klíma from Matfyz (*the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics at Charles University*), and Jan Bubeník (*a student at the Charles University Faculty of Medicine*) both stood out, and Monika Pajerová (*Charles University Faculty of Arts*), Igor Chaun (*the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts*) and Pavel Žáček, a journalism student, were here. There were many more of them. And it was the students who were crucial in what was going on at the time. Not only because they started the entire course of events, but they also travelled with popular actors to more remote places in the country and helped break the information vacuum that was prevalent in many places.

Did Václav Havel change during those revolutionary days?

I knew Havel as a rather shy introvert with a sense of humor, polite, modest. In November he suddenly started to function like a general. For him, November was the result of something he'd been working toward for many years. Suddenly everyone turned to him and expected a decisive response from him. And he had to be decisive, giving orders and in-

Vladimír Hanzel Music journalist and critic. From 1989 to 2003 the personal secretary of the dissident and later President Václav Havel, and the director of his secretariat. From 2003–2006 he was the chief executive of the Cabinet of the Minister of Education, from 2006–2008 the director of the education and cultural center of the Jewish Museum in Prague. On 18 December 2011 he was the first to announce Havel's death on Facebook.



structions. He felt the great responsibility that fell to him unexpectedly.

Havel received several honorary doctorates, including one from Charles University in May 1990.

How did he perceive these awards? Of course he appreciated all of them very much. But he approached them with humility and a certain sense of perspective. He had a "Hall of Fame" in the hallway near the bathroom in Hrádeček where he hung all of his honorary doctorates, diplomas and awards.

What was something that meant a lot to him?

The Peace Prize of the German Booksellers Association in Frankfurt, just before the Velvet Revolution. He couldn't go there in person, but he wrote "Words on Words" as his acceptance speech,

which was read at the award ceremony by the popular actor Maximilian Schell. What's more, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Richard von Weizsäcker were at the ceremony.

Does Václav Havel's legacy still resonate in society?

I think so. A survey was recently published in which a large percentage of people consider Havel to be the best post-1989 president. I personally prefer to avoid these judgments because after all, I live in my social bubble, and it wouldn't be completely objective of me. Many of the things Václav Havel advocated, for example in the field of human rights or the considerate treatment of nature, are timeless. I am deeply convinced that many people will be inspired by him in the future, and that these things will continue to be beneficial.

Out of shadows and injustice into the free world

Charles University's post-revolution rectors emeriti look back on the miraculous year of 1989 and events inside the university during their service.

STORY BY **Martin Rychlík**

PHOTOS BY **Jan Smit, Vladimír Šigut, René Volfík**



“A real revolution”

“We had to change the system and deal with totalitarian injustice,” recalls **Karel Malý**, a professor of legal history, who led Charles University's teaching from 1994 to 1999 as the 505th rector in its history.

November 1989 was a fundamental change for Charles University and for myself, a real revolution. My life, as well as the life of my entire family, has been closely linked to the university. I was personally affected by all the interference of the power of the party into the life of the university and I shared their bitter life in the era of normalisation. As a lawyer, I was afraid of the party's interference in the university's life and I tried to break free from the closed circle of totalitarian life by working with foreign colleagues.

November 1989 opened the way for fundamental changes and I had the good fortune to play a significant role in them. We not only had to change the conditions of awarding scientific degrees and titles, to remove the residue of party merit and ideological demands, but also at the same time to deal with the legitimate requests to eliminate the cruel injustices that affected an unbelievable number of teachers and students who were deprived of the ability to research and study.

While discussing requests for rehabilitation, what opened up before us was a glimpse into the depth of injustice and suffering. At the same time it was necessary to establish democratic order at Charles University, to create new rules for the activity of academic bodies – to fundamentally transform the university into a democratic institution and fulfil the requirement to incorporate it into the system of the world's free universities (...) Numerous inter-university agreements made international cooperation accessible and again included Charles University into the network of global universities.

I think that the culmination of the university's post-November developments was the celebration of the 650th anniversary of its founding (in 1998), which was preceded by the difficult re-

construction of the Carolinum building. It was then that our community presented itself as united, conscious of its mission, its role in society, in education and in the world. At a ceremony in the Vladislav Hall in Prague Castle, after a speech by President Václav Havel and in the presence of a large delegation of foreign rectors, I gave a lecture on summarising our ideas about the position and role of universities in an uncertain, changing world. The process that started in November 1989 was completed in an incredibly short time – thanks to the selfless work of the entire university community, its students and teachers.

Prof. JUDr. Karel Malý, DrSc.



A shining example for others

“It was essential to place scientific activity at the same level as teaching,” says physicist **Ivan Wilhelm**, who took over the rector's insignia from February 2000 and wielded it until 2006.

Considerable attention by state authorities after November 1989 was given to universities both as a legitimate request due to the role of students in the “Velvet Revolution” and also because the conditions for academic life were in unacceptable shape. The Federal Assembly passed the new Higher Education Act on a very ad-hoc basis, and the newly-established university bodies had a considerable influence on its design; Charles University played a crucial role in it.

A number of “imperfections” in the new Higher Education Act were tolerantly passed as a sort of temporary provision, which would soon be regu-

lated by another amendment (...) An important circumstance was the transition from strong faculty independence to university autonomy. The success of this process at Charles University was primarily because new relationships were set up to convince the academic community of the meaningfulness of the adjustments. Charles University then served as an example to a number of other universities in the Czech Republic to take constructive steps. And we are pleased to say that at present there are 17 self-confident faculties working as one university unit without any signs of centrifugal forces.

Putting scientific activity at the same level as educational activity played a crucial role in establishing Charles University as an important, internationally recognised institution. Despite this condition not being accepted automatically throughout Charles University, we succeeded in putting forward a sufficiently wide diversity of disciplines and to relatively rapidly introduce a system of parallel cooperation between science and education. This fact has helped greatly in building our university's reputation in international academic fora.

Prof. Ing. Ivan Wilhelm, CSc.



The most amazing time

“The collapse of the hideous regime brought about massive euphoria,” says physiologist **Václav Hampl**, who led the university from 2006 to 2014, when he became a member of the Czech Senate.

November 1989 and the months that followed were definitely among the most amazing times of my life. I'll never stop

being grateful that I was able to experience it.

I come from a family of political prisoners from the 1950s; I've known since I was young about the hideousness of the regime we lived in – and through the years I've become even more convinced. They caused a feeling of hopelessness. And then when it started to collapse quickly, my feeling was one of massive euphoria. First it was mixed with concerns about whether the Communists would follow the example of their Chinese comrades half a year earlier, and also with the need to not wait passively for what would happen and instead do our utmost to succeed.

A wonderful part of my memory of November 1989 is the ubiquitous sense of belonging, of joy and overflowing humour, mutual kindness and thoughtfulness. The experience of being able to treat ourselves together in this way for several weeks was encouraging. If we want some inspiration from November '89 for today, let's look in this direction! Shared positive energy is a huge force.

I used my acquired freedom to broaden my professional and personal outlook with five years of postdoctoral work at the University of Minnesota in the USA. When I returned before the end of the millennium, our university had undergone a transformation into a free institution of a democratic state. As the chairman of the Charles University Academic Senate, I then experienced one of the strongest slogans of November '89: “Back to Europe”.

And when I became rector shortly thereafter, one of the most important tasks was to make the most of the opportunities this created. The soaring values of a number of parameters (the number of foreign students, record Erasmus arrivals and departures even in pan-European comparisons, scientific publications and especially the most important ones) have shown that the university has done well. This is why I'm proud of my *alma mater*, its students, workers and partners.

Prof. RNDr. Václav Hampl, DrSc.



Our first and last demonstration

On 17 November 1989, Šimon Pánek organized one of the best-known protests against the communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically, he did not participate in it personally due to a temporary job in the Šumava forest. What he didn't expect was that it would have such an impact on society.

STORY BY Jitka Jiříčková PHOTO BY Luboš Wiśniewski

Thirty years later the events of the revolution must have intermingled somewhat for you.

At the time we got by on very little sleep, maybe three or four hours per day, and that affects your perception. So we were in a bit of a trance. But how many times in your life does it happen that Communism falls? The same Communism which destroyed the lives of your family, when a couple of months earlier it appeared that you'd never get to see anything other than a couple of socialist countries, that you'd never get to speak your mind out loud? What do you think? And suddenly everything

changes, and thanks to a singular turn of fate, you get to be there. You even have an intense feeling when you're one of the people bringing about its end, which was really true at that specific moment.

Is there any powerful moment that sticks out, even after all these years?

Definitely the consultations with Václav Havel. That was when I saw him in person for the first time, and it wasn't just me that he impressed with his undisputed charisma and clear leadership role in the Civic Forum. I also can't forget my appear-

ance on the balcony of the Melantrich Palace, when a quarter of a million people stood below me and waited on my every word.

At the time you studied at the Faculty of Science. What did it look like there at the end of the 1980s?

The faculty was already a fairly open environment, and I met with a lot of people from there at the demonstrations. This was probably also due to the fact that natural sciences topics, maybe except for the environment, were outside the interests of the Communist Party. The social sciences fields were much more overrun with undercover cops or informers..

You actually managed to organise just one demonstration – 17 November 1989. How did you manage to attract so many people to it?

Because it was permitted, and we were able to publicly get word out about it in advance. We also didn't choose the date of 17 November randomly. It was International Students' Day, and we said that because of that the Communists would have a harder time banning it.

But you didn't participate in the demonstration.

Yes, it's a paradox – I'm one of the student leaders, but I wasn't on Národní třída. I left for a temporary job in Šumava. It didn't occur to me that it would be *Stuha's* first and last event. Only later did we learn that the dissidents were discussing their participation in the demonstration. Václav Havel told them: "No, don't go there. Let the students do this event themselves." It was certainly an expression of his humility.

How did you see the future for Czech society in November 1989?

Of course I thought it would all be easier. Firstly because we didn't have any experience in building a functional democracy and market economy, which if possible would be for everyone. Logically, the pendulum swung from a centrally-managed state economy, where if something wasn't explicitly permitted it was forbidden, to the opposite extreme, where newly-gained freedom enabled some people to try out things that were often over the line in terms of morals and sometimes even the law.

I remember my father's words: "It will take two generations to get everything in order. We're going relatively quickly economically, but it will take a very long time to get Communism out of us internally – in the sense that lying, cheating and stealing a little is normal." To this day there's much less willingness among people to help, to do volunteer work or to contribute to it.

After the change you estimated future developments as being more of an evolution than a revolution. What phase do you think we're in now?

If you ask people in Ukraine or Georgia how we're doing, they'll tell you that we're a model for them. We ourselves may have far more skepticism in us than is healthy. Our society is moving forward economically, and communal life has moved forward greatly, with the restoration of monuments, cities and the countryside.

On the other hand, what have we failed at?

I'd say that we have greatly underestimated education for active citizenship, something which Germany, for example, has invested in for fifty years now, and they have undergone a great postwar self-reflection. Such a society is then much more capable of going through various social upheavals. For example, they managed to accept a million refugees. Twelve hundred came here and you remember what happened.

I assume you've always tried to do the best thing you could at the given moment. But don't you regret not completing your university education?

A little, yes. One should bring things to completion. After '89 I interrupted my studies. I did go back to school, but in the meantime we founded People In Need, and I started to travel the world. It took me very far from my diploma thesis. The data accumulated seemed outdated to me, and so I said it would be better to end it. Of course I was a little sorry. At the same time it probably saved me from a career as a senior official in the European Union. When we entered the Union, a couple of people from formerly Communist countries received offers to join their bureaucratic apparatus. But the condition was a university degree, and I didn't have that.

You studied for four years at the Faculty of Science. What did you learn?

Above all to deal with problems exactly, which I've found useful both in my work in People In Need and in life in general.

Šimon Pánek is the co-founder and executive director of People In Need, an organisation that has operated since 1994. In 1988, he was the main organiser of the first pre-revolution humanitarian assistance to the victims of an earthquake in Armenia. A year later he became one of the student leaders of the Velvet Revolution. In the first democratic elections he was elected to the House of Nations of the Federal Assembly, but resigned from his mandate. He co-founded Epicentrum, a private information agency covering news from crisis areas around the world. In 2000, he was awarded European of the Year.

The Velvet Revolution

...as seen by our 4EU+ Alliance partners

STORY BY **Martin Rychlík**



University of Warsaw

After the end of World War II, the countries of Western Europe enjoyed democratic freedom and the free market economy, whereas countries of Central and Eastern Europe had to face criminal communist regimes. The years 1956, 1968, 1981 and finally 1989 demonstrated that their spirit of freedom could not be broken and that the regimes had to fall. Poles, who were already enjoying the first non-communist Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, watched the “Sametová revoluce” with great interest and supported it wholeheartedly. I myself remember keeping my fingers crossed while listening to Václav Havel’s speeches and hoping that our Czech and Slovak friends would succeed. We also cannot forget about the role of universities in the transition of 1989. I can boldly state that the changes of 1989 could not have taken place without Charles University, the University of Warsaw and many others. Professors and especially students were among the first to stand up to the regime, despite fears that the regime would take its revenge if they were not successful. Today we can proudly say: Yes, we did it! Congratulations on the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution!

Maciej Duszczyk
vice-rector



University of Copenhagen

I grew up in post-war Europe. During my childhood, the division of Europe in two blocs, East and West, was a fact. It was just the way things were. The Cold War, and especially the fear of a devastating nuclear war, was a common theme in adult conversations. But it was also implicitly understood that a divided Europe was not how “things used to be”.

During my student years at university, I visited several Central and Eastern European countries. The differences between our systems were striking, but so were the similarities between our people and our shared cultural heritage.

In September 1989, one year into my PhD, I attended my first scientific conference. It was in Warsaw. A Solidarity-led government had just taken office a few weeks earlier. It was an overwhelming experience to meet young scientists from Poland, who were both exhilarated and anxious. A reunited Europe was suddenly a possibility, but it could not yet be taken for granted. However, a few months later, thanks to the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic and the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was clear to all that the process was irreversible (...)

The universities of Europe have always been interconnected, even dur-

ing their time of separation. Almost like a family. We were established with the same purpose and we share the same basic ideas: that research and research-based education are essential for the development of people and societies. We are even formed by mutual organisational inspiration; the University of Copenhagen was initially formed by inspiration from Charles University. So, in the bigger picture, we are tied to each other like siblings. During the Cold War, these ties weakened, but like real siblings, who were separated by destiny and then reunited, we have quickly found each other in fruitful cooperation within the EU. I am thrilled that with the establishment of our new partnership 4EU+, we will grow an even deeper and more mutually valuable collaboration to the benefit of European society at large.

Henrik C. Wegener
rector



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI MILANO

University of Milan

The 1989 Velvet Revolution, with its twofold character of strength but also moderation, has consolidated among Italians a positive image of Prague and its artistic, cultural and political heritage. The election of a poet, writer, and philosopher like Václav Havel as a guide of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1990, was perceived in Italy and in Europe as a major signal that a new era was beginning, marked by increasing dialogue and cooperation.

Our rector, Elio Franzini, emphasizes that our university, over the last 30 years, has continuously dedicated conferences and lectures to different moments in Czech history. As an example, a major conference entitled “The Fall of the Walls: Twenty Years Later”, was organized at the University of Milan in 2009, bringing together scholars and some of the main protagonists of those events, such as Václav Havel and Lech Wałesa.

The rector is also glad to announce that today, in order to remember the Velvet Revolution with its profound cultural impact (starting with Havel’s legacy) the University of Milan will install a “Václav Havel bench” in its main building. The artwork will be composed by two wooden armchairs alongside a small table next to a tree. The initiative, part of a large commemorative project launched all over the world, represents an invitation to further dialogue and shared reflection. We would indeed like to continue the path of educational and scientific collaboration, at every possible level, made possible by the extensive EU framework of projects and agreements as well as by the input of our respective universities, both marked by the idea of combining tradition and innovation in a creative way.

Antonella Baldi
vice-rector



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

Heidelberg University

On the 30th anniversary of the “Velvet Revolution”, Heidelberg University most warmly congratulates Charles University and expresses its solidarity with her Czech partners.

The significance and implications of this historical event which began as a student revolution and resulted in the peaceful transition of power in what was then Czechoslovakia, are particularly well appreciated in Heidelberg and Germany as a whole.

Indeed, in November, Germany will also be celebrating one of the most important events in post-war Germany: the peaceful fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. Just one week before the “Velvet Revolution”, and set in a very similar political context, the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the beginning of a reunited Germany.

Heidelberg University is honoured to share with Charles University not only a similar recent history but also a bright common future, especially as partners in the recently founded 4EU+ European University Alliance.

Marc-Philippe Weller
vice-rector



Sorbonne University

The Velvet Revolution was a wondrous display of liberty. It was a relief after the terrible events of ‘68. It was a triumph for values we hold dear: democracy, human rights, free-thinking, and free expression.

It started with student protests, an amazing and humbling reminder of our role in society: universities are places for ideas to grow, for the youth to challenge the status quo – and we should keep nurturing such drive in our communities.

It evoked our collective European spirit, harkening back to the Age of Enlightenment, and paved the way for a united Europe, founded on solidarity and harmonious cooperation among peers. Universities are at the forefront of this project.

Indeed, the memory of the Velvet Revolution should inspire us all – as institutions and individuals – to keep fighting, together, for the values we share.

Serge Fdida
vice-president



The rectors of all six universities in the 4EU+ Alliance at a meeting in Paris. CU’s rector, Tomáš Zima, is at the end of the row, on the right.

Velvet Revolution

Jak vysvětlit "velvet" zahraničním přátelům
Vaclav Havel

HEY GUYS, ARE YOU SURE WE WANT TO GO TO THIS DEMONSTRATION THING?

LET'S GO GRAB A BEER!

HOW ABOUT THEM?

I AM REALLY NOT INTO POLITICS YOU KNOW.

...LIKE A RALLY

WELL GUYS, NO PRESSURE, BUT LET ME SHOW YOU, WHAT THIS REALITY IS ALL ABOUT.

SOME THINGS WE NOW TAKE FOR GRANTED WEREN'T SO SIMPLE BEFORE 1989...

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION DID NOT EXIST
PERSECUTION HAD MANY FORMS.
PEOPLE LIVED IN FEAR



Czech patron saint



YOUR CAREER

IF YOU, OR YOUR FAMILY WERE NOT LOYAL TO THE SYSTEM WAS DOOMED



DEMOCRACY WAS SERVED BY THE RULE OF ONE PARTY



NEZANISLA MEDIALI



ECONOMY

DRIVEN AROUND BY INEFFECTIVE PLANNING



INFORMATION

ALL MEDIA IN CONTROL OR THE PARTY



DISAPPEARED IN 1968 AFTER MOSCOW ORDERED INVASION

BY ARMIES OF WARSAW PACT

STUDENTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ACTIVE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

WOW! AMAZING!

I FEEL A PART OF IT ALL NOW. I GUESS IT IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF HISTORY!

IF WE DON'T KNOW OUR HISTORY, WE ARE BOUND TO REPEAT IT. SOME THINGS ARE WORTH THE FIGHT.

IN 1969 JAN PALACH SET HIMSELF ON FIRE

TRYING TO WAKE THE NATION.

