



Prague:1918-2018

Places
Events
Histories

prague.eu/czechoslovakia



1918
100
2018

Prague:emotion

CONTENTS

A century of Czech statehood	1
Major Events Calendar	6
Map of the city centre.	14
Places associated with the founding of Czechoslovakia	16
Key figures and their stories	22

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A century of Czech statehood

2018 is no ordinary year for our Republic. 100 years since the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic, 50 since the Prague Spring (1968) and other historical anniversaries (1938 and 1948). All have fundamentally shaped national identity and ordinary people's destinies. Join us as we revisit the recent past and the fateful eights of our stormy 20th century.



Wenceslas Square on 28 October 1989. Photo: ČTK

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk stood by the cradle

When Czechoslovakia was declared on 28 October 1918 and Prague became the new State Capital, it was a dream come true for generations of Czechs and Slovaks living under the Habsburg monarchy. The birthright of Czech statehood was finally fulfilled. Albeit helped by the 'Great War', the independence drive was largely down to the Czechs and Slovaks themselves. Their quest for statehood took concrete form when expressed by **Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk**, a respected university professor with key connections in the USA and the UK. He was at that time living in exile, just beyond the Austro-Hungarian borders, where he, with a handful of supporters, began a campaign for independence. Chief among them were trusted friends **Milan Rastislav Štefánik** and **Edvard Beneš**.

An important role was played by the **Triple Entente powers**. Their victory in the war was a necessary prerequisite for success. Hence the **Czechoslovak effort** to form **military Legions**, especially in Russia, France and Italy, to support the Allied armies. In Paris, meanwhile, in February 1916, the **Czechoslovak National Council**

was established, to represent the prospective State. Over time, it became a widely recognized provisional Government. Masaryk's project also had significant backing in the USA among Czech and Slovak diaspora, although the most fundamental, and for some decisive support came from President Woodrow Wilson.



T. G. Masaryk arriving at the Wilson (main) Railway Station on 21 December 1918. Photo: ČTK - Mary Evans - Rights Managed

The 'Czech Maffia'

Back home, too, people were ready to help the resistance. The 'Czech Maffia' group sourced and gave crucial information and finance. Finally, on Twelfth Night at the start of 1918, the domestic political scene publicly signed up to the action abroad with the Three Kings Declaration. Most of the former parliamentarians under the guise of the **Czechoslovak National Committee prepared to take power**. The final incendiary spark for revolutionary change came from an ordinary news report on the Entente capitulation of Austria-Hungary.

Independent Czechoslovakia at last

From the first moments of its existence, **the fledgling State sided with European democracy**. This was underpinned by a broad spectrum of political parties, prominent intellectual public figures, headed by President Masaryk, the Sokol movement, and a wealth of cultural and social activities. The multinational mix of the then 13-million strong Republic hinted that all would not go smoothly. Although the historic boundaries were upheld, an important land reform established, a strong currency created and successful industry redeveloped, many problems simmered on. It soon became clear **how fragile was the international stability of the Versailles peace in Europe**. Not even a mutual treaty with France was to save Czechoslovakia from aggressive Nazi demands.

1938 – the Munich Agreement and occupation

The successful start of Czechoslovak statehood was violently cut short in September 1938, when the leaders of **Great Britain, France and Italy kowtowed to Hitler to cede parts of the Czechoslovak territory to Nazi Germany**. Just a few signatures under the 'about us without us' agreement brought WWII a step closer. Czechoslovak calls for justice fell on deaf ears. The League of Nations looked on as Nazi aggression proceeded, unhindered.



Acting Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich, with Secretary of State of the Reich, Karl Hermann Frank. Photo: ČTK

1948 – the February fiasco of democracy

The course of WWII, and the fact that restored Czechoslovakia found itself in the immediate sphere of interest of Stalin's Soviet Union, facilitated the **February 1948 rise of Czechoslovak Communists to totalitarian power**. The one-party dictatorship took numerous forms. At the onset, it was accompanied by tragic 'cleansing'; political trials and potential opponents being physically done away with. Czechoslovak democratic tradition was all but dead and buried.



Communist Prime Minister (later President) Klement Gottwald surveying the People's Militia units on 28 February 1948. Photo: ČTK

1968 – The Prague Spring and the August occupation

Another fateful year for Czechoslovak democracy began in January 1968. Heading up the Communist Party was newly elected **first secretary Alexander Dubček**. It seemed the party was ready for a renewal process and open to self-criticism. While at home censorship was abolished, with widespread cautious optimism and naive confidence in liberalization, the Soviets strongly rebuffed any changes. They felt threatened by this Czechoslovak infection and took a radical step. Finding that Czechoslovak Communists would not toe the line, **the 'fraternal' armies of the Warsaw Pact crossed Czechoslovak borders just after midnight on 21 August 1968**, to restore order and thwart this 'counter-revolution'. Socialism with a human face never got its chance.

Soviet tanks in Wenceslas Square, August 1968. Photo: ČTK



1988 – Turning the tide

The coming of political changes in Europe, starting with Soviet perestroika, loosened the till-then strong bonds of the pro-Soviet bloc. The stance of Czechoslovak official circles saw hardly any change, however. They still denied **civil initiatives**, with no hint of a more liberal approach to social events, as confirmed by **brutal police intervention on Wenceslas Square in January 1989**. Only after the fall of the Berlin wall, the events in Poland and Hungary, and in particular the actions of Prague students on **17 November 1989** did Czechoslovak Communist leaders respond. The fall of this old guard was accelerated by their needlessly tough reaction to a peaceful student rally. This at once prompted the formation of the **Civic Forum**, whose drive to take power was crowned with success when in **December 1989** Václav Havel was elected President of Czechoslovakia.

The end of Czechoslovakia and a new beginning

Václav Havel going from Dissident to become Czechoslovak President was for many an auspicious sign for the country's prospects. But not even he could, nor tried to, block the Slovaks' dream to have a country of their own. This goal was reached by a fair and amicable route. On **1 January 1993** the world map acquired two new States, opening yet another new chapter of Czech statehood. **Václav Havel becoming the first new Czech President** personified the new situation.

The Letná plain: Manifestations on 25 and 26 November 1989. Photo: ČTK



Major Events Calendar

Throughout 2018, numerous exhibitions, concerts, shows and other events are due in Prague, themed around the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic, but also other important anniversaries of our history. The celebrations will culminate on 28 October 2018 with a grand military parade and the reopening of the National Museum. For more info and events please see our continually updated website prague.eu/czechoslovakia.



Exhibitions

The Restoration of Prague Castle 1918–1929

until 6 May 2018

Theresian wing of the Old Royal Palace at Prague Castle, Prague 1 – Castle District kulturanahrade.cz

What changes did Prague Castle undergo in the first decade of the new Czechoslovak Republic? Archival materials reveal the transformation of the Castle from a drab memento of Habsburg power to a symbol of the new democratic republic. Newly created 3D models allow access to previously inaccessible areas that mark the oldest Castle memorabilia.

Founded 1918 | Through the labyrinth of Czech history

27 February – 1 July 2018

Imperial Stables at Prague Castle, Prague 1 – Castle District kulturanahrade.cz

The exhibition gives an immersive experience of the thousand-year-long formation and development of the Czech State. The central exhibit is the Vladislav Privilegium, dating from 1158, the oldest surviving Charter of our history. Before getting to see that, however, visitors must negotiate a labyrinth of history...

Founded 1918 | Touchstones of Statehood

7 March – 28 October 2018

Riding Hall at Prague Castle, Prague 1 – Castle District kulturanahrade.cz

Another exhibition of the Founded 1918 project, devoted mainly to the history of State insignia. Visitors will see the top State decorations given over the last century, as well as unique archival documents linked with recent history turning points, e.g. a collection of the Order of the White Lion medals, the Škoda VOS presidential limousine, the text of the radio address by President Edvard Beneš following his abdication in 1938 or Milada Horáková's letters from prison.

Founded 1918 | The Prague Castle Guard

28 June – 28 October 2018

Theresian wing of the Old Royal Palace at Prague Castle, Prague 1 – Castle District kulturanahrade.cz

Inexorably part of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic is that of the Castle Guard. Hundreds of photos and a series of three-dimensional exhibits relate its century-long history. It is no coincidence that the start date of this exhibition coincides with the XVI Sokol "Slet" gathering. The Sokol association most notably helped protect Prague Castle shortly after the Republic was declared.

Alfons Mucha: The Slav Epic

approx. from the mid of June till the end of October

Municipal House, náměstí Republiky 5, Prague 1 – Old Town obecnidum.cz

This series of twenty large-format paintings by Alfons Mucha (1860–1939), summarizes the history of the Czechs and the other Slavic Nations. To mark the founding of the Republic, the exhibition halls of the Municipal House will display a selection from this cycle. These will be the smaller canvases, for capacity reasons.



Made in Czechoslovakia; world-class industry

27 September 2018 – 30 June 2019

National Technical Museum, Kostelní 42, Prague 7 – Holešovice ntm.cz

Selected exhibits bring to life the stories of notable Czechoslovak firms and leading figures of Czechoslovak art and industry, of fascinating phenomena and distinctive products that became household names in Czechoslovakia and abroad. The exhibition presents the technical and industrial progress of Czechoslovakia as such, from its inception in 1918 until 1992, when the country split up.



28 October / An exhibition of independent Czechoslovakia

28 September – 31 December 2018

Municipal House, náměstí Republiky 5, Prague 1 – Old Town obecnidum.cz

In the last months of WWI the Czech Gentlemen's Club availed their premises to the Czechoslovak National Committee, whose representatives, the so-called '28-Octobermen' signed the founding Act of an independent Czechoslovakia. And it is precisely in these historic rooms that the Prague City Archives, in cooperation with the Municipal House, will be showing exhibits on this landmark period of Czechoslovak history.

The 2018 national anniversary exhibition 'Czech early days'

14 October 2018 – 30 April 2019

Prague Exhibition Grounds, Výstaviště 67, Prague 7 – Bubeneč mladecesko.cz

The exhibition references the past, while highlighting the State-founding jubilee. The first part takes stock to sum up what has been achieved in 100 years. The second part will be science-educational and forward-looking to our prospective selves. The third part will focus on the presentation of major industrial companies, and trade in Czech goods. The fourth will show contemporary Czech culture, themed around Czech national identity.

A Czecho-Slovak and Slovak-Czech exhibition

28 October 2018 – 30 June 2019

The historic building of the National Museum, Václavské náměstí 68, Prague 1 – New Town cesko-slovensko.eu

An exceptional joint project of the National Museum and the Slovak

National Museum on the history of the joint Czech and Slovak State. It will cover how the initially far-fetched notion of Czechoslovakia became reality, focus on the similarities and differences of both peoples, and what ultimately led to the joint State splitting up in 1992. The relations between the two nations will be shown through the fates of specific people. The public will also get to see the interiors of the National Museum, following its extensive remodelling.

New Collections exhibition at the National Gallery in Prague

from 28 October 2018

National Gallery in Prague – Veletřní palác, Dukelských hrdinů 47, Prague 7 – Holešovice ngprague.cz

On the occasion of 100 years since the founding of Czechoslovakia and 50 years since the events of August 1968, new collections will showcase on two floors. The exhibition named '1918-1938' will focus on art from the beginning of the First Republic until 1938, including the famous French collection largely bought by the Czechoslovak State soon after it came into being. Following on from it is the exhibition '1945-1989', charting the development of art from the end of WWII until 1989.

Truth prevails (now and again). Images from (not only) Czech history

28 October 2018 – 3 February 2019

National Gallery in Prague – Veletřní palác, Dukelských hrdinů 47, Prague 7 – Holešovice ngprague.cz

The aim of the exhibition is to evaluate the stereotypical presentations of historical events. It focuses on works on paper as the medium of choice for conveying the particular (and current) moment – through leaflets, popular prints, period records and magazine illustrations, which, using the same resources, can double as the official view of an event, or its opposite.



Music

The Prague Spring: with a Czechoslovakian accent

12 May – 3 June 2018

various venues festival.cz

The main dramatic theme of this year's international music festival will be to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic. You will hear the music of Czech and Slovak composers who found their place on the world stage and helped form the modern cultural image of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic abroad. The Czechoslovakian accent will also reflect in the opening and the closing concerts.

The Prague Spring: Promenade concert

 27 May 2018 from 3 pm

 Wallenstein garden, Letenská 5, Prague 1 – Lesser Town

 festival.cz

The concert in honour of Czechoslovak Legionnaires from the years 1916–1918 will feature music by B. Smetana, A. Dvořák and K. Hašler.

Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK: Saint Wenceslas

 27 September 2018 from 7:30 pm

 Municipal House, náměstí Republiky 5, Prague 1 – Old Town  fok.cz

A silent film on the life of the Czech Saint with live music by Oskar Nedbal and Jaroslav Křička. The monochrome silent movie dating from 1930 is the first ever about St. Wenceslas.

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra: The Republic Jubilee Concert

 3 October 2018 from 7:30 pm

 Rudolfinum, Alšovo nábřeží 12, Prague 1 – Old Town

 ceskafilharmonie.cz

The leading Czech symphony orchestra will mark this jubilee year with a gala concert, featuring the Overture to the 'Bartered Bride' opera by Bedřich Smetana and the renowned 'New World Symphony' by Antonín Dvořák.

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra: Opening concert of the 123rd season

 10 and 11 October 2018 from 7:30 pm

 Rudolfinum, Alšovo nábřeží 12, Prague 1 – Old Town

 ceskafilharmonie.cz

Another delight from The Czech Philharmonic, entering the upcoming concert season under a new chief conductor, Semyon Bychkov. Under his baton, and joined by the Prague Philharmonic Choir, the Orchestra will open with the monumental 'Resurrection' Symphony No. 2 by Gustav Mahler.

The Radio Symphony Orchestra to the nation

 28 October from 3 pm

 Rudolfinum, Alšovo nábřeží 12, Prague 1 – Old Town

 rudolfinum.cz

A special concert organised by Czech Radio in cooperation with Slovak Radio and TV, playing the Czech and Slovak National Anthem, the Sinfonietta by Leoš Janáček and Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 in E minor "From the New World".

100 years of the Republic

 28 October 2018 from 3 pm

 Lucerna Palace – large hall, Štěpánská 61, Prague 1 – New Town  lucpra.com

The main guests of the evening, the "Pražský výběr" rock band, will

play their only concert in Prague this year. Other guests include rock stars such as David Koller and his Kollerband, Vladimír Mišík and ETC, Ivan Hlas, and the legendary Garage with Tony Ducháček to round off the evening.

Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK: A Concert for the Republic

 28 October 2018 from 7:30 pm

 Municipal House, náměstí Republiky 5, Prague 1 – Old Town  fok.cz

The Concert for the Republic has become a tradition, dedicated to all who make a positive difference for the Czech Republic. This year's 100th jubilee will lend a particularly festive air. It will feature Bedřich Smetana's symphonic poem cycle 'My Country'.



Theatre

Libuše

 first night on 14 September 2018

 National Theatre, Národní 2, Prague 1 – New Town

 narodni-divadlo.cz

The opera Libuše, as a work inspired by a period of political tension, a vision of peace and unity to come, promised harmony. The storyline derives from the legend of princess Libuše, from the Kosmas Chronicle, but in detail drawing on the Zelenohorský Manuscript. Bedřich Smetana finished this opera in 1872, but it first rang out on stage nine years later, when the National Theatre opened. This work is primarily meant for festive occasions, and even now gets to be performed at the National Theatre only on special days and public holidays. Libuše is inextricably linked with modern Czech history and that of the National Theatre, where it has been heard many times, for its exceptional humanist and social message. The title role always goes to the leading soloist of the ensemble. Libuše is a lasting and major symbol of Czech national musical culture. Director: Jan Burian.

Simply Kylián

 first night on 11 October 2018

 National Theatre, Národní 2, Prague 1 – New Town

 narodni-divadlo.cz

As part of 100 years celebrations the National Theatre Ballet is getting ready to put on a festive première, named Simply Kylián. This project pays tribute to the notable Czech native, choreographer Jiří Kylián, an iconic figure in the world of dance. The evening will feature four opuses – the Psalm Symphony, Bella Figura, Petite Mort, and Six Dances.

'Colonel Švec'

 **first night on 25 October 2018**

 **New Stage, Národní 4, Prague 1 – New Town**

 **narodni-divadlo.cz**

A historical event from 1918, which a decade later became the subject of a stage play – and quite a hit at the National Theatre. This tale of the Legions in Russia was not performed again until 1938. How would the true story of Colonel Josef Jiří Švec, portrayed for the stage by playwright Rudolf Medek, face up to other 'fateful eights' years of Czechoslovak history? The heroic Legionnaire play takes its current rendition forward, drawing on multimedia and documentary theatre, to bring home the fate of the hero as well as of the play itself. In its time, the play has been the subject of stormy controversy and political struggle in its own right. Director: Jiří Havelka.



Miscellaneous

XVIth All-Sokol meeting

 **1 – 6 July 2018**

 **The Eden Arena, U Slavie 2a, Prague 10 – Vršovice**

 **slet.sokol.eu**

The Czech Sokol (falcon) association has run All-Sokol "Slet" (flock-together) meetings since 1882. This year's Slet will culminate at the Slavia football stadium with 11 set-pieces for all ages. 15 000 gymnasts from the Czech Republic and 2 500 more from abroad are to take part. The gala will include the traditional parade through downtown Prague, mass in St. Vitus Cathedral at Prague Castle, a performance of 'Our Swaggerers' and the National Theatre New Scene and other cultural and social events.



Festive military parade

 **28 October 2018**

 **Evropská boulevard, Prague 6**

One of the highlights of the centennial celebrations of the Czechoslovak State will be a festive military parade on Evropská boulevard. The procession will present some 2000 Czech Army servicemen and women, 200 pieces of military equipment, as well as 300 staff from the integrated rescue system. The parade will also feature active reservists, with war veteran participation promised. The equipment on the show will include Gripen jet fighters as well as the L-159 Alca planes, tanks, armoured cars and military and police helicopters. After the parade, visitors may go via Dejvická street to Letná, to review military and security service equipment from 1918 to the present.



Legionnaire train

 **28 October – 18 November**

 **Prague–Dejvice railway station, Václavkova 1, Prague 6 – Dejvice**  **csol.cz**

A train of 12 historic carriages, dubbed the "Legiovlak" of the Czechoslovak Legion corresponds to the period and charts the life and strife of these men. Visitors can see the sleeping car, the field post office, the most reliable way to communicate in Siberia at that time, the medical car or the blacksmith's wagon with its machining workshop. The Legionnaires' fighting is borne out by the impromptu armoured car, or the operations room staff car. The project features expert commentary and archival materials & film.

Editorial deadline 10 January 2018.

Programme content subject to change.



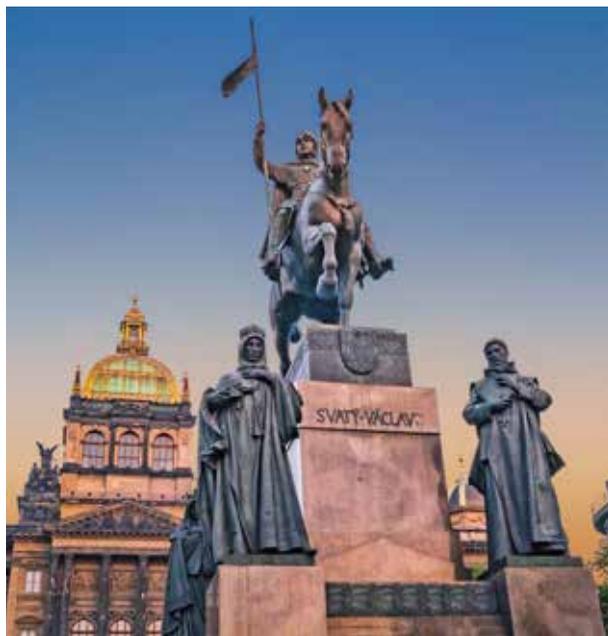
- 1 Wenceslas Square
- 2 "Národní politika" offices
- 3 Lucerna Palace
- 4 Harrach Palace
- 5 Old Town Square
- 6 Municipal House
- 7 Prague Castle
- 8 Lichtenstein Palace
- 9 Thun Palace
- 10 Kolowrat Palace
- 11 Clam-Gallas Palace
- 12 Rudolfinum

Places associated with the founding of Czechoslovakia

Wenceslas Square (*Václavské náměstí*)

📍 Prague 1 – New Town

For many Prague residents, Wenceslas Square is its metropolitan heart. When King Charles IV founded the New Town of Prague, he made this the centrepiece of the new settlement. Although the square has had many facelifts since then, it has retained its social-centre role to the present day. The monumental building of the National Museum has witnessed many momentous events of Czech history. It was right here on Wenceslas Square, under Myslbek's statue of St. Wenceslas, that crowds gathered on 28 October 1918 to declare the founding of Czechoslovakia.



The 'National Policy' newspaper (*Národní politika*)

📍 Václavské náměstí 15, Prague 1 – New Town

In the lower part of Wenceslas Square an unassuming commemorative plaque adorns the façade of one of the houses. It marks the headquarters of the "Národní politika" newspaper. This is where it all started on 28 October 1918. This printing plant and publishing house had a storefront, with a window display bearing the current issue. On the morning of 28 October, passers-by were met with an announcement of the peace conditions accepted to mark Austria-Hungary's surrender. This moment became the decisive trigger. People waited no longer. They manifestly declared the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The Lucerna Palace (*Palác Lucerna*)

📍 Štěpánská 61, Prague 1 – New Town

One of the most interesting modern Prague structures was built between 1907–1920. The investor, organizer and constructor, rolled into one, was ing. Václav Havel, entrepreneur, whose grandson – Václav Havel – later became President. Lucerna Palace also played an important role on 28 October 1918. Indeed, it housed the headquarters of the Grain Supply Bureau, and wending their way to it were two of the five main godfathers of the Republic – Antonín Švehla and František Soukup, to get the keys to the grain supply to feed the inhabitants of the nascent State.



The Harrach Palace (*Palác Harrachů*)

📍 Jindřišská 20, Prague 1 – New Town

The baroque Harrach Palace is named after Franz Ernest, count of Harrach, its 19th-century owner. In 1918, the palace took on a completely different role. Immediately after 28 October, it came to house the Czechoslovak National Committee, which addressed the new State's many initial issues. This then grew into the Revolutionary National Convention, the first Parliament of the Republic.

Old Town Square (*Staroměstské náměstí*)

📍 Prague 1 – Old Town

Historically the oldest Prague square, previously called the Great Marketplace. It was here the first merchants and craftsmen settled, to trade and do business. Over time, they built a proper town hall, with the astronomical clock that became the town's hallmark. Until 1918 the Great Marketplace also featured a Baroque Marian Column. Unfortunately, after the Czechoslovak State was declared, in early November 1918 this notable work of sculptor Jan Jiří Bendl fell victim to an emotionally charged crowd, who saw in it a symbol of deposed Habsburg power.

The Municipal House (*Obecní dům*)

📍 náměstí Republiky 5, Prague 1 – Old Town

No other place in Prague is as linked to the events of 28 October 1918 as the Municipal House. Indeed, from the moment the Three Kings' Declaration issued from its Grégr Hall on 6 January 1918, expressing the self-determination demands of the Czech nation, the movement became unstoppable.



The impressive Art Nouveau building by architects Antonín Balšánek and Osvald Polívka sprang up from 1905 to 1912. In the midst of the building is the Smetana Hall, where on 13 April 1918 the writer Alois Jirásek swore the national oath of allegiance on behalf of the cultural, scientific and political public.

Its Czech Gentlemen's Club became the meeting place of eminent Czech politicians, especially after the Czechoslovak National Committee meetings were re-established. The portraits of the five '28-Octobermen' document that first Czechoslovak law was signed here, as well as appeals, addressed to the new Nation.

But the prime moment for the Municipal House came at 5 p.m. on 28 October 1918, when the Grégr Hall rang out with the memorable words on the founding of Czechoslovakia.

Prague Castle (*Pražský hrad*)

📍 Prague 1 – Castle District

Prague Castle had been for centuries the Czech royal and imperial residence. No wonder it was chosen by first Czechoslovak President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk as his administrative seat, when he took office in December 1918. It soon became clear the castle needed substantial remodelling to befit the head of a modern democracy. The task fell to Jože Plečnik, a Slovenian architect, who had Masaryk's full confidence. His modifications to Prague Castle are evident to this day. Among others, they include the granite obelisk, the Bull Staircase, the Hall of Columns, and the South Gardens.

The Lichtenstein Palace (*Lichtenštejnský palác*)

📍 Malostranské náměstí 13, Prague 1 – Lesser Town

The Lichtenstein Palace used to be associated with the Royal Governor, but in the 19th century became the seat of the Supreme Military Commander of Prague, whose office was still based here in 1918. Fears of possible intervention by the Austro-Hungarian army against the newly established Czechoslovakia were running high. There was also a large garrison in the Joseph barracks on today's Náměstí Republiky Square. The troops then stationed in Prague were for the most part Hungarians. It was crucial to reach an accord with the military HQ, or to defend Prague by force, a role taken up by the Sokol movement in October 1918.

The Thun Palace (*Thunovský palác*)

📍 Sněmovní 4, Prague 1 – Lesser Town

The Bohemian State Diet (Landtag) used to meet on Sněmovní street. Many elected members of this assembly went on to play an important role in the political events of 1918. The Revolutionary National Assembly, formed immediately after the announcement of Czechoslovak statehood met for the first time in the Thun Palace on 13 November 1918, codifying the new State and proclaiming Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk president the day after. It also affirmed the members of the first Czechoslovak Government.

Photo: Ivan Král





The Rudolfinum

The Kolowrat Palace (*Kolevratký palác*)

📍 **Valdštejnská 10, Prague 1 – Lesser Town**

The Kolowrat Palace came to house the new Republic's Bureau of the Ministerial Council, the de facto Prime Minister's Cabinet. It was bought for the needs of the State in 1921 and following a thorough remodelling passed over to the Presidium, which moved here from their offices on the third courtyard of Prague Castle.

The Clam-Gallas Palace (*Clam-Gallasův palác*)

📍 **Husova 20, Prague 1 – Old Town**

This monumental Palace, whose façade is decorated with sculptures by Matyáš Bernard Braun, progressively became an important cultural centre, hosting exhibitions and staging theatre plays.

Immediately after 28 October 1918, the Palace offered its premises to the Ministry of Finance, headed by Alois Rašín. It was from here that Rašín organized the stamping of banknotes already in circulation, turning them into independent Czechoslovak currency.

The Rudolfinum

📍 **Alšovo nábřeží 12, Prague 1 – Old Town**

The Rudolfinum makes an impressive edifice, built as a cultural and social centre for the metropolis by architects Josef Zítka and Josef Schulz in 1885. Between 1919-1939 the building housed the Chamber of Deputies of the National Assembly. The former Concert Hall became the Parliamentary debating chamber right up till the dramatic days of imposed Nazi power.

Key figures and their stories

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

* 1850 Hodonín

† 1937 Lány

Masaryk is one of the key figures of modern Czech history. Nowadays, he is virtually Czech statehood personified.

A remarkable man, who at the ripe age of 65 pursued the seemingly impossible: he believed the **Czechs and Slovaks deserved a sovereign democratic State** and strove to make it happen. He had embarked on a very onerous task, however – against the backdrop of the 'Great War' to address the US, the UK, France, Russia and Italy, to convince the decision-makers among the Entente powers. This tricky task was not one for himself alone; he gathered together several collaborators, who acted with him concertedly and patiently between 1914–1918. At last, the incredible came to pass, and on **28 October 1918, the Czechoslovak Republic was declared, in Prague.**

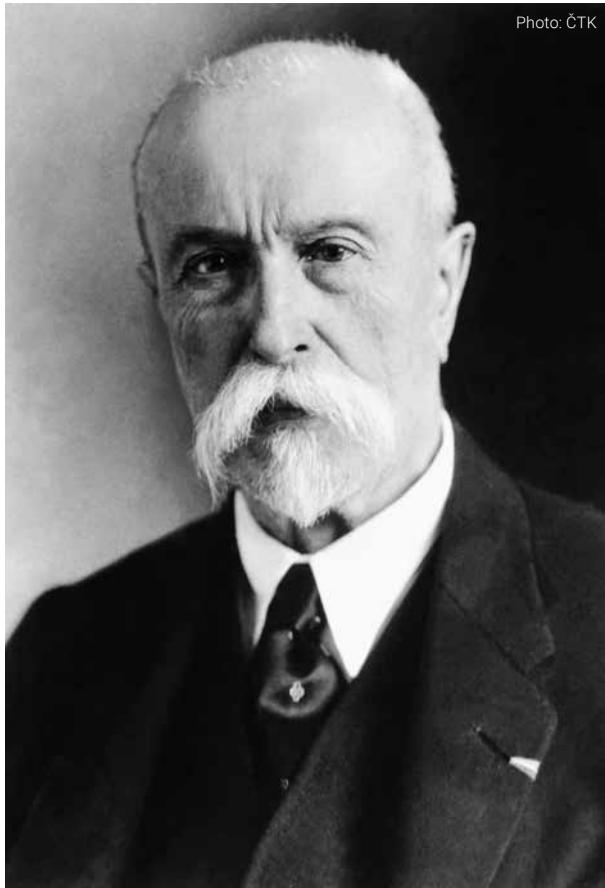


Photo: ČTK

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was never just a politician, but always took a keen interest in public affairs. During his time in the Imperial Parliament, he first pushed for the autonomy of the Czech Lands within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When he realised the Vienna Government would never accept the idea, he went into opposition. On the brink of the First World War, he radically overhauled his approach and decided to **initiate the formation of an independent State.**

In December 1914 he worked abroad, seeking support for the project, which he clearly laid out on 6 July 1915 in Geneva. He resided for many months in London, focused primarily on getting the support of English-speaking countries and the formation of Czechoslovak troops abroad, the Czechoslovak Legion. In February 1916 he took part in the foundation of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris. This was to form the provisional Government of the prospective State. Once he got the Legion established in Russia, he left for the USA, where on 18 October 1918 he issued the so-called **Washington Declaration – on the independence of the Czechoslovak nation.**

On 14 November 1918 and then again in the years 1920, 1927 and 1934, he became **Czechoslovak President.** Although his actual presidential powers were very limited, his natural authority and non-partisan approach allowed him to win mutual respect and the cooperation of otherwise die-hard rivals.

His lifelong love was the educated, emancipated, naturally confident and tolerant American, Charlotte Garrigue. Masaryk took his wife's name as part of his own surname, clearly reflecting his stance on the relationship between men and women. *"Woman is Man's absolute equal, with just a physical difference: she is the weaker."*

Edvard Beneš

* 1884 Kožlany

† 1948 Sezimovo Ústí

Foreign Minister, statesman and also the second Czechoslovak President. Few figures in our past evoke so much emotion and differences of opinion. But it was indeed Edvard Beneš who significantly contributed to the emergence of the modern Czechoslovak State. At the international level of the Versailles peace conference, he was able to justify its existence and form. In the words of President T. G. Masaryk: *"Without Beneš, we would not have had the Republic."*

Even before WWI, Beneš was well aware of the need to resolve the ethnic problems in the monarchy. When the World War broke out, he gave his support on the issue of Czech statehood to T. G. Masaryk. He first **headed up the Czech Maffia**, an organization to secure funding and information for Masaryk's resistance movement abroad. At the end of September 1915, he then decided to go into exile and personally participate in the founding of the independent State.

A task like no other fell to Beneš in October 1918, specifically when the Czech political representation met in Geneva. A major debate

took place, to bring together the resistance movement abroad and the politicians at home. No less important was his personal participation in the international post-war Peace Conference at Versailles.



His role as Foreign Minister, which he managed with great aplomb, lasted uninterruptedly from 1918 to 1935. He steered Czechoslovakia to cooperate with France, under the Petite Entente. He was a man of great political vision, very well able to foresee international relations. As **co-founder of the League of Nations (LN)** he served as its Vice-Chairman and later Chairman.

He openly warned against the rising tide of Nazi aggression, but also tried to defend Czechoslovakia by means of a new Czechoslovak-Soviet pact. Despite these efforts, and even as the President, he failed in his efforts to defend the Czechoslovak Republic. The Munich Agreement revealed the soft underbelly of European security.

After his abdication and retreat abroad, Beneš formed a **Czechoslovak Government** in exile, in London, which from the outset worked with the antifascist coalition. *'Atonement for Munich'* also much influenced Beneš during WWII and after 1945. That was a whole other chapter in the political fate of Beneš, culminating in the events of February 1948.

Alois Rašín

* 1867 Nechanice

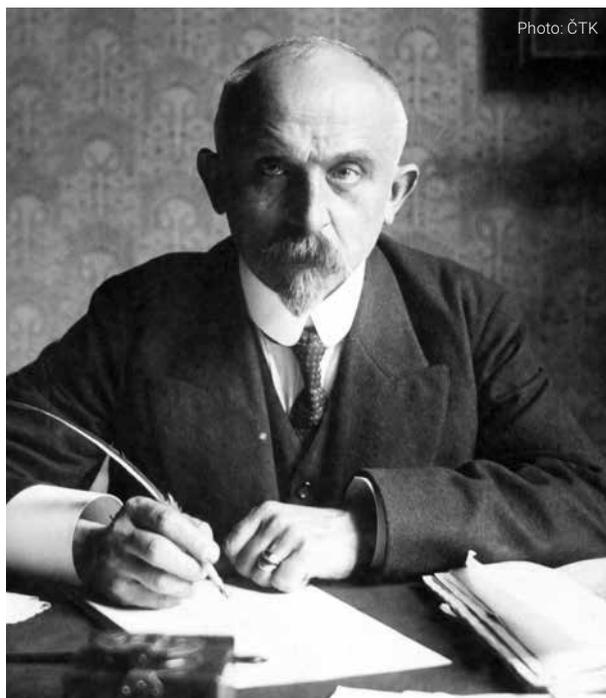
† 1923 Prague

This very determined man made his mark in the new Czechoslovakia as its **Finance Minister**. He was an economist, lawyer, politician and one of the most important representatives of the new Republic. During his lifetime, he had twice been sentenced by Austro-Hungarian courts, once even to the capital punishment. Yet it was an **assassin** that killed him.

As a young law clerk, Alois Rašín was appointed to the Territorial Criminal Court, and also practised in several law firms. For his radical views, he was put before the "Omladina" political trial in January and February 1894 in Prague. The young lawyer was accused of conspiring against the Emperor and initiating an alleged secret anti-Habsburg League.

But not long after the outbreak of WWI, the life of Alois Rašín began a whole new chapter. Although he didn't agree with all the views of T. G. Masaryk, he supported the resistance abroad, was one of the first members of the Czech Mafia and **engaged in anti-Austrian initiatives**. His political friendship with Karel Kramář was to seal his fate. On 12 July 1915 Alois Rašín was arrested, and in the subsequent show trial sentenced to death for treason. Fortunately, the coronation amnesty of Emperor Charles I secured his freedom.

He was one of the '28-Octobermen', so was there on that illustrious day at the Municipal House to announce the formation of the Republic and the first Czechoslovak law, of his own wording. He also co-wrote the appeals for a calm and dignified handover of power.



As Finance Minister he had to stabilize the Czechoslovak economy. This he achieved by closing the State border, endorsing banknotes and taking some currency out of circulation. Along with that he had to **create a Czechoslovak currency**, secure funding for the new State and underwrite bank guarantees. He was an advocate of the gold-standard, a balanced State budget, a major role for private ownership and deflationary State policies. He was the butt of many complaints, including actual assaults, but remained unfazed by being the least popular member of the Government. On 5 January 1923, he was shot by a young anarchist outside his home in Prague's Žitná street and died from his injuries.

Milan Rastislav Štefánik

* 1880 Košariská

† 1919 Ivanka pri Dunaji

An exceptional, immensely gifted man, he was not a politician, but found in politics the means to fulfil his goals. His **main idea was to bring together the Czechs and Slovaks into a joint State**, independent from the Habsburg monarchy. This was an idea he was committed to by means both diplomatic and military.

In his youth, he was drawn to study astronomy at Charles University in Prague, where he became a pupil of T. G. Masaryk and openly aligned with the anti-Habsburg cause. Not forsaking his astronomy, he went to Paris to continue his studies and scientific work. He worked as an Assistant at the Observatory in Meudon, and repeatedly went up Mont Blanc. He specialized in solar and meteorite observation. His achievements in meteorology and telegraphy earned him the French Order of the cross of the **Knight of the Légion d'Honneur**.



Photo: ČTK

After WWI broke out, and now a French citizen, he volunteered for the army, which welcomed his professional skills. He supported Masaryk's goal of an independent Czechoslovak nation. In 1916 he participated in the founding of the Czechoslovak National Council, the representative body of the future State. He also helped form the Czechoslovak Legions in Italy, Serbia, Romania and Russia. Among his greatest diplomatic achievements was the **Founding Decree of the Czecho-Slovak army in France** issued in December 1917 by the French Government.

Štefánik, an esteemed specialist with excellent political contacts among the Entente powers, opted to join the resistance movement abroad. He had a crucial role, as one of the Masaryk – Beneš – Štefánik triumvirate. He arranged key negotiations with Entente leaders, albeit having rather different opinions than Masaryk on some points. For instance, the form prospective Czechoslovakia should take was a hot topic, since Štefánik had considerable reservations about a republic, but he always sought and found a compromise solution.

The role earmarked for him in the first Czechoslovak Government was **Defence Minister**. He was responsible for troops abroad, the Legionnaires in particular. In this capacity, he also took part in the Peace Conference at Versailles.

Milan R. Štefánik was belatedly returning to his homeland in the spring of 1919. During his trip, on 4 May 1919, he **died tragically in a plane crash near Bratislava**.

Karel Kramář

* 1860 Vysoké nad Jizerou

† 1937 Prague

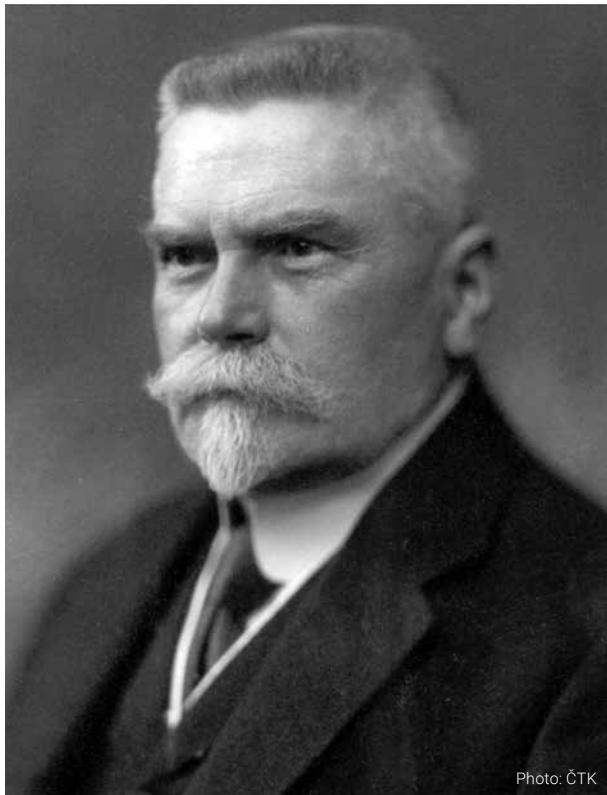
The fate of Karel Kramář was in many ways tied to the emergence of Czechoslovakia, but he was at the helm only very briefly. Although he was the only one of the 'founding fathers' and co-inventors of Czechoslovak statehood to fit the bill of a **professional politician**, he ended up completely sidelined.

As a trained lawyer he had from his youth engaged in Czech State law and also the economic contribution of the Czech Lands to the Habsburg monarchy. Over time, he met T. G. Masaryk, and with him formed the political grouping called the Realists. Their programme was a realistic, soundly based, patriotic policy.

In 1891 he stood for and was successfully elected to the Imperial Parliament, as the **youngest parliamentarian of the Habsburg monarchy**. Three years later, he added to this his seat at the Bohemian Landtag. He was an excellent orator, always clear, understandable, to the point. He did well, **leading the Liberal National Party – the "Mladočeši"** (Young Czechs) in the early 1900s.

His unapologetic pro-Russian views logically made him a target for the Austrian secret police. In addition, he was a very active member of the Czech Maffia. It wasn't long before Karel Kramář was

arrested. He ended up spending 25 months in jail, before being pardoned by the incoming Habsburg Emperor Charles I in his Definitive Amnesty, allowing his return to political life. March 1918 saw the founding of the 'Czech Constitutional Democracy' grouping, later the National Democrats, under his leadership.



October 1918 found Karel Kramář fully engaged. The meeting of domestic and foreign resistance in Geneva decided that he would become the **Prime Minister of the first Czechoslovak Government**. His triumphant return home, wide recognition, and the role of Prime Minister secured his participation at the International Peace Conference at Versailles.

Yet it was this Paris Peace Conference that highlighted how great was the **gulf between the pro-Czarist stance of Kramář and the diplomatic standpoint of Beneš**. Kramář was not one to make diplomatic concessions, nor to come to terms with the fact that Czechoslovakia had to align with much more powerful allies. Kramář was not a success on the domestic scene, either. After the elections in 1919, he was no longer the head of Government, nor a significant player in State administration.



Václav Havel – the last Czechoslovak and first Czech president.
Photo: Karel Vlček – ČTK



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