

## Conference: Velvet Ideas of November 1989 in the Mirror of Changes in Czech Society

On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, the Department of History organized the conference *Velvet Ideas of November 1989 in the Mirror of Changes in Czech Society*. In its content and character, the conference built upon a previous event held by the Department of History five years ago at the Faculty of Education, titled *30 Years of the Velvet Revolution, or Democracy Is Not a Given*. The conference took place on November 12, 2024, coinciding with the feast of St. Agnes. The aim of the conference was to explore not only the Velvet Revolution itself but also the situation on its eve and in the first years that followed. Authentic participants from various fields of political, economic, cultural, and social life were invited as speakers. Before a full auditorium in the largest lecture hall of the Faculty of Education (nearly 300 attendees), the first speaker was Ivan Gabal – politician, former MP, sociologist, one of the founders of Civic Forum, and advisor to Václav Havel. For Václav Havel, he established the Analysis Department of the Office of the President of the Republic. In his presentation, he focused on the handling of freedom, social networks, and the threats facing contemporary Czech society. Ivana Janů, politician and judge, former MP in the Czech National Council and later in the Chamber of Deputies, as well as Vice President of the Constitutional Court, highlighted the role of the Constitutional Court in the democratization process. Although Ivan Lukavský was the least known to the public, his authentic testimony about pre-November petitions, the organization of demonstrations during the so-called Palach Weeks in Brno, and the formation of the so-called Moravian Youth was a highly valuable and important addition to the conference's topic. Petr Oslzlý, former Rector of JAMU, former dramaturge of the Husa na provázku Theatre, founding member of Civic Forum, and advisor to Václav Havel, provided insights into the theatrical and cultural world and its role in 1989 and beyond. Petr Pithart, politician, lawyer, university professor, and twice President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, previously also a Member of Parliament, focused on serious and even more serious mistakes made from November 1989 until the 1992 elections. The churches and the spiritual sphere were represented at the conference by Mons. Josef Suchár, who currently serves at the pilgrimage site in Neratov (known for its church with a glass roof). Just a few weeks before the conference, he was awarded the Order of T. G. Masaryk IV. class by the President of the Republic. He provided insight into the situation of the church before November 1989, as he himself had been secretly ordained within the so-called underground church. He also worked as the leader of the "Pioneer" camp, which was in fact a Christian camp called Radost, located in Amerika, a remote area in the Orlické Mountains. At the conference, the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution was also linked to the anniversary of the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union. This historic milestone

was presented by then-Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla. Slovakia was represented by Magdaléna Vašáryová, an actress, politician, former MP, and diplomat, who recently received an honorary doctorate from Masaryk University. In her presentation, she focused on defense issues and cooperation between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. She also highlighted the dangers and pitfalls of the virtual world, which many among the youngest generations tend to escape into. The common message shared by all speakers was: Let us cherish freedom and democracy. Following the guest presentations, a lively discussion took place. During a meeting with the leadership of the Faculty of Education, the distinguished guests signed the commemorative book and engaged in informal conversations. After the conference, attendees had the opportunity to watch the film *Havel*.

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