
Academic Senate Celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the University Statutes

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We, the members of the Academic Senate,
expressing the will of the academic community of Charles University,
following the tradition of the oldest institution of higher education in Central Europe,
aware of the importance of the university for the development of human knowledge, education and culture, and its mission in serving the purpose of truth and in developing the ideals of humanity,
striving to further the idea of the university as a community in which relationships among members are determined by spiritual authority, not political power; in which the principles of academic freedoms are honoured as the necessary foundation of the existence of the academic community and its activities in both research and teaching, bearing in mind the need for furthering of the sovereign and autonomous character of the university, as well its independence from the structures of political power, being determined to provide access to education to anyone who desires it, endorsing the idea of international cooperation among universities not only as the basis for international research, but also as a prerequisite for education of the following generation towards understanding and tolerance, fulfilling the legacy of those who sacrificed their freedoms or lives for these ideals, and guided by the aspiration that Charles University regains the position among free universities that had rightfully belonged to it since its foundation, have adopted these statutes.

On January 21, the Academic Senate convened in the Great Hall of Karolinum to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the key document that governs the university and to honour the contributions of those who took a great part in drafting of the document and governing of the university in the subsequent years. As the current chairman of the Senate, **Professor Jan Hála**, noted, several hundred academics have since taken part in the work of the Senate. *“We would like to honour the contribution of the 120 most active past and current members with commemorative certificates and copies of the foundation charter of Charles University.”*



The statutes of Charles University in Prague were passed by the Academic Senate on December 19, 1990 and came into action on January 1, 1991. It was registered at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports on April 23, 1991.

Professor Ivan Wilhelm, chairman emeritus of the Academic Senate and Rector emeritus of Charles University, reminisced about the painstaking and extremely challenging process of designing of the statutes:



“The early days of Charles University’s Academic Senate were dominated by the work on the statutes. Excluding the long hours dedicated to them in numerous other bodies of the Senate and the university as such, the records state that the content and wording of the Statutes of Charles University took six plenary sessions of the Senate to work out, and that the final version was passed on December 19, 1990, as a Christmas present to the university. The important thing to remember is that it is the preamble of the statutes that states the basic principles of our academic lives and the reasons for the university’s very existence. We should not only remind ourselves of these principles from time to time, but follow them and fulfil them in our everyday work. It is a permanent obligation of any member of the academic community to care for and follow these principles as the necessary attributes of academic life.”

In the following speech, **Dr. Michal Svatoš**, the chairman of the 1990 statutes committee of the Academic Senate, highlighted the broader historical context of the importance of the statutes both in the Czech and European contexts.



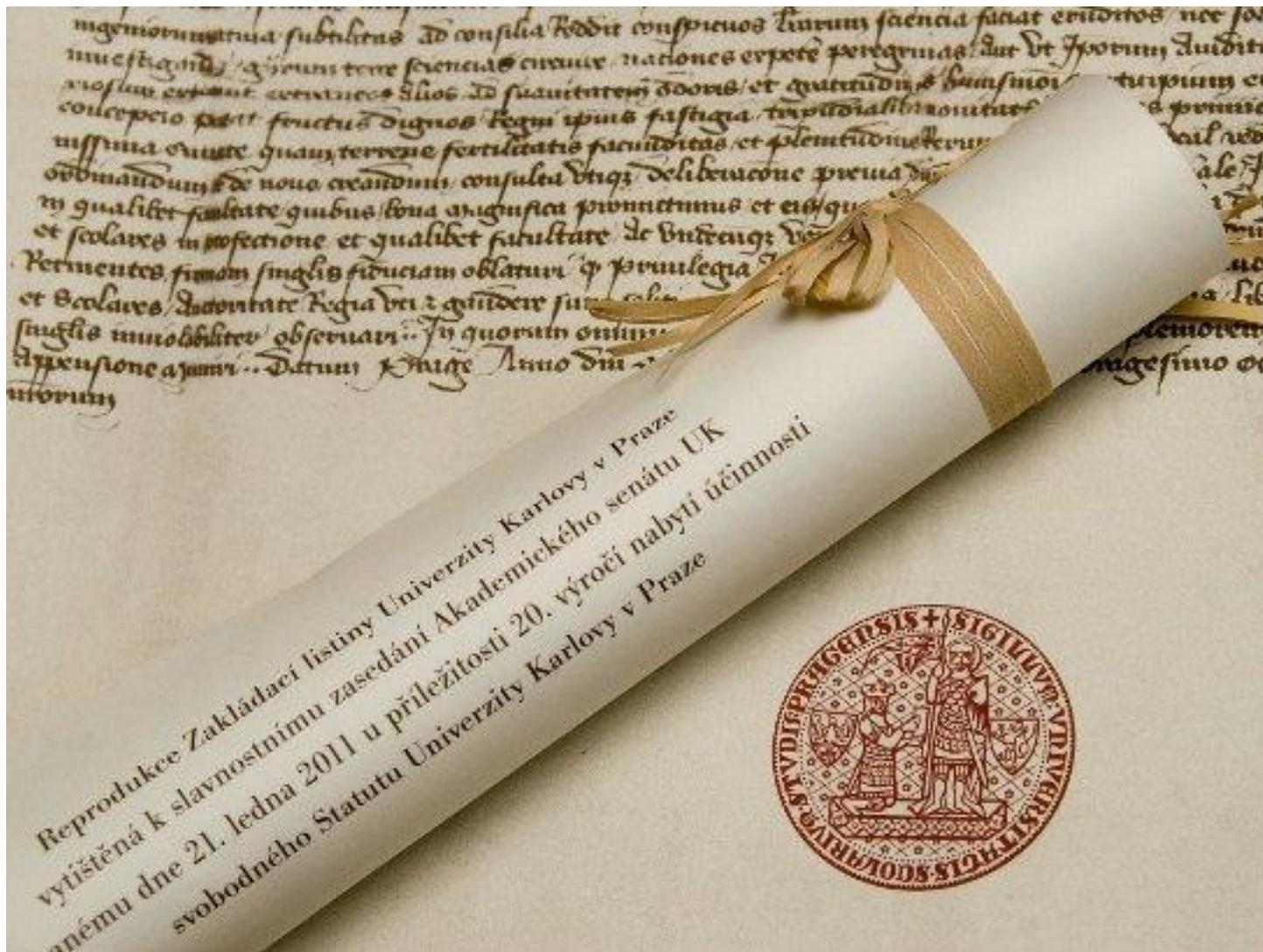
“Recounting the principles of university autonomy today, after 20 years of life in a free society, seems like stating the obvious – but let us keep in mind that in 1990, these were ideas whose procurement was not obvious at all. Trying to sum up my thoughts about the first post-1989 Charles University statutes, I cannot find anything more fitting than the then-pervasive cliché about the “return to Europe”. The 1990 statutes were not a mere return to the past, they were not an exploration of something new or an attempt at finding a “third way”. It was a humble attempt at a return to where this university had belonged for centuries. It was a return to something that had been common here and that the luckier nations never lost – simply said, it was a return to a normal life.”

Rector of Charles University, Professor Václav Hampl, then gave a talk about the current state and the future of the university, whose free development was launched by the statutes.



On the day of the ceremonial session, the new Long-term Development Plan of Charles University for the 2011-2015 period was passed, reacting to many important changes in the society, in higher education and research. The new development plan stressed the focus of the university on science and research.

To coincide with the anniversary, the secretary of the Senate, Mr. Daniel Feranc, set up an exhibition dedicated to the story of the statutes and the work of the Academic Senate, which can be seen in the reception halls of Karolinum. Six panels show for example the delegation cards, a diagram of the structure of the Senate with the names of the current members, or tables showing attendance of Senate members at the sessions in the 1990-2010 period, sorted by faculty. Among the most valuable exhibits are the "First Statutes of the University of Prague adopted by the chancellor of the university and the archbishop of Prague, Arnošt of Pardubice on April, 10, 1360" from the Charles University archive and the "Draft of the provisional statutes passed by the Academic Committee of the university on January 12, 1990."



The ceremonial session of the Academic Senate was followed by a performance by the musical group Spirituál kvintet. (Marie Kohoutová)
Translation: Jaroslav Švelch