

Tradition and Transformation: The Czech Parliamentary Library

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Since its establishment in the mid-nineteenth century, the Czech Parliamentary Library has evolved into an open institution integrated with the Archives, serving as a bridge between Parliament and the wider public. Above all, it is a public library providing extensive information resources not only to Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff, but also to employees of the Supreme Audit Office and the wider professional community. Alongside its indispensable legal collections, the Library covers a broad range of social sciences that contribute to both current and future legislative debate. In recent years, it has undergone a significant transformation, both in its physical form and in its institutional mission.

A New Branch, Symbol of Transformation

The most visible symbol of this transformation is our newly established branch outside the capacity-constrained historic parliamentary complex. The new building strengthens the Library's role as a public institution, enables the development of a wide range of new activities, and significantly enhances its public visibility. Its impact is further reinforced by its location in one of Prague's rapidly developing districts. The branch is therefore primarily focused on engaging with the public, from students to subject specialists. An increasingly important part of its

activities is cooperation with universities through book presentations, seminars, and educational visits. The Library's collections extend far beyond the geographical and chronological boundaries of today's Czech Republic and include many unique items of particular value to university students and researchers. We therefore actively promote our holdings as valuable primary sources for academic theses and research projects.

Internally, the new facilities have created first-class conditions for managing the complete life cycle of library and archival collections—from cataloguing and digitisation to conservation and their secure long-term preservation in modern repositories meeting the highest professional standards. Our conservation laboratory is able to respond flexibly, selecting the most appropriate treatment for damaged materials through both rapid interventions and preventive conservation. Its primary objective is, naturally, to prevent the loss of cultural heritage. At the same time, our digitisation programme, focused primarily on archival collections, significantly improves public access to historical sources through online services.

Services Evolution

The new parliamentary term (2025–2029), rapid technological development, and changing user expectations all provide a strong impetus for continued modernisation. This is reflected not only in our services but also in the



composition of our team, which now extends well beyond traditional librarians and archivists. Our staff also includes specialists in linguistics, area studies, history, education, philosophy, and art history. This diversity enables us to respond more effectively to changing demands while finding new ways of communicating with wider audiences. User engagement also plays an important role in shaping our acquisitions policy. For example, the most recent parliamentary elections brought a new generation of younger Members of Parliament whose priorities have introduced entirely new topics into parliamentary debate. At the same time, we continue to simplify lending services and improve the overall user experience. Our long-term vision is the seamless integration of electronic databases, the digital library, and the online catalogue into a single, fully interconnected information environment.

Cultural and Memory Institution

An important part of this evolving mission is our growing role as Parliament's cultural and memory institution. Drawing on the richness of our collections and the expertise of our staff, we have developed a number of projects that broaden the traditional role of both the Library and the Archives while serving Parliament and the public in new ways. A key area of activity is our exhibition and publishing programme. Each year, following a long-term plan, we prepare exhibitions based exclusively on our own archival collections, presenting major historical themes through the perspective of parliamentary history. These exhibitions are accompanied by two publication series: exhibition catalogues and thematic guides introducing users to our collections. Another important area is the care and interpretation of Parliament's art collection, combining historical scholarship with a contemporary approach to cultural development. The aim is to bring fresh external perspectives into the unique environment of the legislature. A notable milestone was the ceremonial presentation of the Constitution of the Czech Republic,



featured in the April issue of this newsletter. Through its stewardship of the Parliamentary Building Archive, our institution also documents the historical development of the parliamentary complex in the historic centre of Prague, creating valuable links with architectural heritage conservation. This interest in Parliament's historic buildings has also led to cooperation with the Czech Technical University, resulting in a highly specialised yet practical architectural manual for the maintenance and adaptation of the interiors of the Chamber of Deputies.

As IFLAPARL celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, the Czech Parliamentary Library and Archives proudly continues a tradition dating back to 1927, when its first director, Z. V. Tobolka, was among the founders of IFLA in Edinburgh. Today, we see ourselves as an institution well positioned to fulfil its mission within Parliament while continuing to strengthen its connections with the wider world in a rapidly changing society.

