
CU marks 50th anniversary of Jan Palach's sacrifice

By Jan Velinger
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This January 16 marks exactly 50 years since Czech student Jan Palach's self-immolation at the top of Wenceslas Square that would lead to his death in hospital three days later.

Through his sacrifice, the student of Charles University, who was only 20 years old, hoped to rouse his fellow citizens from apathy and resignation months after the Soviet-led invasion that had crushed the Prague Spring.



Twenty years later, his act would inspire new protests that preceded later demonstrations that eventually led to the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia in November of 1989.

On Wednesday, **Charles University honoured Jan Palach's legacy** in a special ceremony – unveiling a memorial bronze plaque or tile newly installed in a courtyard at the heart of the university's Carolinum – the very courtyard where mourners paid respects before the student's coffin 50 years ago.

The specially commissioned memorial, featuring Palach's name and the dates of his birth, his self-immolation and his death, was designed and produced by Czech **sculptor Jakub Vlček**.

In the courtyard at the Carolinum, it is located near a statue of Jan Hus.



Symbolically, the tile measures 69 by 69 centimetres (to mark the year of Palach's sacrifice) and weighs exactly 89 kilos (in reference to 1989 and the Velvet Revolution which fulfilled his legacy).



The university's **Rector Tomáš Zima** spoke ahead of the unveiling about the student's sacrifice, calling Palach "one of the most important figures in Czechoslovak and Czech history who fought for freedom and democracy"; **Vice-rector Jan Royt** welcomed attendees including high school students from Palach's school in Mělník, and invited the public not to miss an exhibition at the university's Carolinum remembering Jan Palach, which lasts until January 25th.



The exhibition features historic photographs, ribbons from wreaths mourners brought to Palach's coffin in 1969, original condolence books and letters written to the student as he lay dying in hospital. Entry to the exhibition is free.



Towards the end of the ceremony at Charles University on Wednesday many of those in attendance gave an impromptu rendition of the Czechoslovak national anthem and attendees were able to light a candle get a closer look at the artistic work commemorating Palach's legacy.