



EVROPSKÁ UNIE  
Evropské strukturální a investiční fondy  
Operační program Výzkum, vývoj a vzdělávání



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,  
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY

## **1. Where and when they appeared here: the beginnings of Czech state and its rise – from Přemyslides to Luxembourgs**

This lecture should guide you through the oldest history of Czech lands. It left aside Prehistory and pre-Slavic settlement. It should introduce you succession of dynasties that ruled over Czech land since 9<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then it focuses on Přemyslides and Luxembourgs who dominated Czech Lands for most of the medieval times. It selects only the most important or the most interesting rulers. This introduction as other lessons is accompanied with important cultural events or works connected with this history you can see in Czech Republic, especially in Prague now.

### **From the first settlement to migration of nations**

I only mention that first human beings were here one million years before our times. Many different cultures changed here since that, including Neanderthals, Celts and Germans. The civilizations settled here since 800 years before Christ had already stratified society and had contact with ancient world. Around the turn of our era when Germans lived there before Slavs the first emperor in Bohemia is documented.

### **Slavic settlement and first state formations on Czech territory**

First Slavic “state” formation was Empire of Samo that lasted shortly in 7<sup>th</sup> century. We know very little of it, especially its end is unclear

The first formation we can call state is Great Moravian Empire. It was ruled by Mojmir dynasty and lasted around eighty years. It was also the first formation on Czech territory that turned to Christianity. In the year of 831 Moravian nobility was baptized and in 863 important Christian mission came to Moravia and brought new liturgy and what is more important, alphabet. In its heyday the Empire included big parts of Czech lands, Slovakia, then south east of Germany and



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southwest of Poland and partly Hungary. Its end is probably connected with attack by Hungarians in 905/906

Přemyslides is the dynasty that ruled over Czech countries for the longest period from at least from 870 to 1306. We don't know anything about the beginning of the dynasty only myths and legends were preserved. The first documented ruler is Bořivoj who at first ruled from Levý Hradec near Prague. The power struggle among Přemyslides was very cruel and it happened very often that ruler was killed by his relative (mainly by brother or son) in the first centuries of their rule. The most known is the assassination of Wenceslas by his brother Boleslav in 934. He then was canonized and became patron of Czech lands. The cases of uprising of son against the father are recorded too. Přemyslides succeeded in making respected and powerful kingdom in central Europe during their rule. The heyday of their rule came with Přemysl Otakar II, who is called Iron and Gold King and who ruled in the second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century. After assassinating Wenceslas III. in 1306 there was no male successor so Czech noblemen searched for a new ruler. They decided for John Luxembourg who married Elizabeth, the sister of murdered ruler Wenceslas III. Luxembourg dynasty lasted only for 127 years while the most important person was Charles IV. (1316–1378) who made Czech lands the centre of his power. It was also the first Czech ruler who became Roman Emperor. During his rule Czech lands became politically the most important country in central Europe. Charles IV. was founder and donator of many new institutions and buildings in Czech kingdom, especially in Prague.

There appeared problems in last decades of his rule. They concerned religious, social and economic questions. So his successors, namely Wenceslas IV. and later Sigismund inherited country in very complicated situation. While Wenceslas IV. was poorly endowed for politics and he died when civil war in Czech lands began, talented Sigismund was not able to overcome complications and hostility of Czech citizens to show his talent to stabilize the country and enable it to play important role in international politics as in the times of his father.



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## **2. “Stopped were smiles of Czechs, wasted were their liberties” or what was a true story of Habsburgs.**

This lesson should introduce you long period of Czech history and show you actual view on Habsburg rule over Czech country, highlight important moments that influenced the history for decades ahead. One of the goals is to assess benefits and negatives of Habsburg rule and talk about some myths that are connected with older assessments.

After relatively long period of non-dynastic rulers and the rule of Jagiellos new king from outside was chosen. By election of Ferdinand I. in October 1526 Habsburg rule over Czech Lands began and lasted 392 years up to October 1918 when Czechoslovak republic was established.

Czech estates were unsatisfied with Ferdinand’s way of rule but their attempts for rebellion were suppressed and Ferdinand I. strengthened royal power kept Czech kingdom under Habsburg’s rule.

One of the most interesting Czech kings from Habsburg dynasty is Rudolph II., who was not very strong and competent rule but he made Prague a centre of culture, art and alchemy when he invited many, in that times known persons to Prague. He also respected and confirmed religious freedom in Czech lands. At the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century religious question was on of the centre of European disputes and conflicts. This was true also for Czech kingdom as well as the process of creating centralized absolutistic monarchies that was typical for example for contemporary France. This process meant weakening of power of Czech estates. They responded by rebellion in 1618 that was suppressed two years later in a battle of White Mountain. This victory of royal side had very unpleasant consequences for Czech lands. Many people lost their properties and had to leave the country and the Czech lands lost their independence and autonomy within Habsburg rule. They lost also their religious freedom. The years of thirty years war was very devastating for whole Monarchy and it lasted several decades to recover the economy. Despite monarchy rested central political power in Europe it started slowly to lag behind Western Europe. After several lost wars during 18<sup>th</sup> century ruler elite saw reforms were needed. So Empress Maria Theresa began to reform state administration with the aim to make it more centralized and more efficient. Beside state administration the reforms concerned economy and education. Because of changes in



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European economy, society and thinking since mid 18<sup>th</sup> century the efforts to finish centralization in absolutistic country were finally unsuccessful. Several reforms (abolishing of serfdom) made by her son Joseph II. turned against the original intention together with influences from the west. Industrialization and French revolution brought unrest to central European society who searched for new social ties when old ones slowly crumbled. National revival appeared as the form of modernization in Germany as well as in Habsburg monarchy. It divided society along ethnical key that caused many problems for ruling elite who was not able to cope with it effectively. Industrialization of central Europe showed also weaknesses of Austrian economy and despite many reforms during the 1850s it was not able to compete with Germany and since mid. 19<sup>th</sup> century it lagged behind Germany so its power in central Europe faded. Despite the rule of Franz Josef was very long and it was full of interested and important events Austria lost several wars (in Italy, later with Germany), he and his governments were not able to reform country adequately to its needs. Internal stress in the country began to grow and when the First World War revealed weakness of the Monarchy. Franz Josef dies in the middle of war as rather unsuccessful Emperor. Austria-Hungary lost the war and broke up to pieces when stayed left by its nations.



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### **3. Nothing but nation has a right to live: National revival – establishing of modern Czech nation.**

The goal of this lesson is to introduce to you key process of Czech modern history – establishing of modern Czech nation. Despite the fact it happened more 170–220 years ago its consequences are felt up today. During this period modern Czech language was established, country became industrialized although industrialization overlapped process of national revival only partly and was finished by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. During period of national revival dominant Czech historical narrative was created, especially by František Palacký and it influences the thinking of history of big share of Czech population up today despite the progress historical science made since this time. It is because this narrative was reproduced during very long period after the process of national revival was finished. Actually the last heirs of this narrative were communists.

The main knowledge you should get concerns wider context of National revival, answers to questions why Czech defended to stay within Austria, resp. Austria-Hungary up to 1914 or 1915, how their political thought and institutions evolved through the time and how did approach of Vienna's government towards Czechs changed.

It is hard to define period of Czech national revival. Its beginnings we can find yet in 18<sup>th</sup> century. Namely as a reaction, or as a consequence of reforms of Joseph II. during the 1780s. Its end is usually situated to the half of 19<sup>th</sup> century when liberal revolution took place in 1848. Up to this date Czech nation developed its political structure and modern cultural life shared among wide part of population.

The process had two main phases. The first one was connected with establishing modern language and promoting it to schools and institutions. The interest in language had several reasons. Two of them are connected with Emperor's reforms. Joseph's orders to establish German as official language and obligatory language in schools induced reaction of Czech speaking intellectuals and activists. Another important source was abolishing serfdom that enabled moving of the population so cities faced immigration from countryside where Czech language was more common than in cities and it revived interest in Czech language. Position of



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Czech language connected with the position of Czechs in Austrian society. Czech were usually on the lower steps of social ladder. So equalizing of the language should have led to equalizing social status of Czech speaking people. To revive Czech language meant to build all aspects of social life in Czech. That is also the reason why Czech national revival had in many respect form of cultural upswing. Concerning relation to the country two main approaches slowly developed during the first phase. State patriotism that was supported by Czech aristocracy and that was not tied to any ethnicity. Czech aristocracy supported cultural and scientific efforts of Czech revivalist but felt no nationalism and refused to support Czech political requirements. Differentiation of political spectrum began in second half of 1830s and was finished around revolutionary year 1848. Creating of political spectrum and ripening of the development in other spheres of social life determinates second phase of Czech national revival. Czech political life was dominated by liberal political stream and first political requirements toward Austrian government appeared. The most important was year of 1848 when Czech position towards Austria and toward Germans was stated and first political body was established – so called National Committee that we can consider as proto-parliament. Despite progress Czech nation made during National revival and especially in 1848 events of next year led to an end of latest promised development and Czech needed to wait for another opportunity.



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