

**Obituary**  
**Prof. PhDr. Jan Křen, DrSc.**  
**(\* 1930 – † 2020)**



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On April 7, 2020, the coronavirus added one of the leading figures in the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University to its severe toll on society, when Professor Jan Křen passed away.

Jan Křen's life path was capricious and marked by the common experiences of many members of his World War II-scarred generation, from joining the ranks of the builders of Communism and then making a futile attempt to repair it, to exclusion from public and academic life after 1968, signing Charter 77, and returning to the fore of his profession after 1989.

In the early days of his professional life, Křen focused on Czech history with a special emphasis on its external context. His study of the Czechoslovak exile community and the resistance during World War II drew on his understanding of Czechoslovak and Czech history as a part of broader processes in the world. He shifted the interpretation of his country's history away from the influence of official Party doctrine and self-centered nationalist views, clearing the way for further research.

For twenty years, Křen was deprived of the opportunity to practice his profession as a historian. He supported himself until the end of the Communist regime by maintaining the pumps at the Vodní zdroje waterworks in Prague, a state-owned water management enterprise. Nevertheless, Křen devoted himself to independent research into modern Czech history and Czech-German relations, including the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and related domestic and external issues, which at the time were marginalized and interpreted with political expediency in mind. The result of his work was a valuable 1986 monograph on the history of Czech-German coexistence in the Czech Lands, *Konfliktní společenství: Češi a Němci 1780–1918 (A Community of Conflict. Czechs and Germans 1780–1918)*. The book was first published in exile by Sixty-eight Publishers in Toronto, Canada.

Prof. Křen's second interest was in area studies, which in the early 1990s was a field not very well known to us, but long developed in the Western world. His desire to introduce the field to the Czech Republic was based on his foreign experiences. The newly established Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University offered him space to do so and area studies began to develop at the Institute of International Studies, of which Jan Křen was the "founding father." In addition to area studies, Prof. Křen was also at the forefront of the field of modern history, focusing first on the history of German-speaking countries and the Central European area, including Czech-German relations, and then moving on with the Institute to the history and current situation of territories from North America to Western Europe, the Balkans, and the post-Soviet area.

From the late 1990s, Prof. Křen focused his professional interests on Central Europe, culminating in an acclaimed monograph *Dvě století střední Evropy (Two Centuries of Central Europe)*, which won the Czech Magnesia Litera book award in 2006. His work embraced Central Europe as a great historical region from the Enlightenment to the end of the twentieth century. In the autumn of 2019, Křen published his final book, *Čtvrt století střední Evropy (A Quarter Century of Central Europe)*, which examined the post-communist development of the Central European region. Křen taught courses on the Central European and the wider European context of modern Czech history through the 2015–16 school year at the Institute of International Studies.

Jan Křen's organizational work and public activities were an inseparable part of his life. In addition to his invaluable efforts to bring the new institute and the field of area studies to life at Charles University, he strove to repair and stabilize Czech-German relations. To that end, he co-founded the Czechoslovak-German Commission of Historians and took part in the Czech-German Future Fund as a member of its managing board. He also taught and lectured at academic institutions and universities in Bremen, Berlin, Vienna, and Marburg. Prof. Křen's work brought him domestic and international acclaim, awards, and decorations, which highlighted the significant mark that he left on the Faculty of Social Sciences and its Institute of International Studies – the space that was always at the heart of his professional and public interest.

We will remember him!

*Jiří Vykoukal*  
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