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Václav Havel gets his “place” in Prague

From today, Prague has a memorial site that commemorates the president and playwright Václav Havel. The untraditional memorial takes the form of two chairs and a table with a tree growing through it. It is located close to Kampa park, on the square Maltézské náměstí, and has been created at the instigation of the City of Prague and the Václav Havel Library. The ceremonial unveiling of Prague’s Havel’s Place will be attended by relatives, friends and colleagues of the country’s first post-communist president.

“Prague is inherently linked to the personality of Václav Havel and our city is paying tribute to him by means of this untraditional memorial. At the same time, it evokes the ideals he defended and thanks to which he was respected throughout the world. I believe that the memorial will become a symbol of discourse between people of different cultures, persuasions and opinions,” said the mayor of Prague, Tomáš Hudeček.

The memorial is the work of the renowned Czech architect Bořek Šípek, who also selected Maltézské náměstí as its location. Though it comprises a round table surrounded by two chairs, he originally gave it the working title of “the bench”.

“Václav Havel was an ardent supporter of dialogue. And he gathered around him people for whom dialogue was literally a vital need. I liked the fact that he couldn’t stand it when somebody wasn’t capable of listening to their partner or opponent. I think that a kind of imperative to dialogue is one of the most valuable elements of Havel’s legacy to today’s divided and disjointed world. Therefore I tried to create a memorial as a useful place that inspires people to share their thoughts and listen attentively. The state we’re in when we speak together is a state of joy,” said Bořek Šípek.

Havel’s Place is a worldwide concept aimed at creating a network of places in the public space that will contribute to meeting and dialogue in the spirit of the philosophy of the Czech Republic’s first post-communist president. The Václav Havel Library, which Dagmar Havlová provided with a license to implement the project via the Foundation VIZE 97, is working to spread that message and the piece.

“We greatly appreciate the fact that it has been possible to erect this memorial in Prague too. Havel’s Place should encourage all residents and visitors to the city to engage in dialogue, partly because we are celebrating the anniversary of the reacceptance of the Czech Republic in the company of democratic European countries,” said the director of the Václav Havel Library, Marta Smolíková.

The first ever Havel’s Place was created on the campus of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The idea has also caught on in Europe and Havel’s Places have been created in such cities as Dublin and Barcelona.

For more on the Havel’s Place project go to:

<http://www.vaclavhavel-library.org/en/havelsplace>

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