

## **Czechoslovakia was born in Geneva**

**The Czech community of Geneva numbers only a few hundred. However, the links which connect the small central European republic with the city of Calvin are as close as they are old. The association which brings together the Czechs of the city was founded already in 1901. It played an important role in the renaissance of the Czech nation by offering support to those leaders, who, seeking the independence of their country, were staying in Geneva at the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup>. And if the small community is delighted to welcome the football team of the mother country, it is also celebrating this year the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence, which was signed in Geneva in 1918.**

Geneva enjoys a privileged position in the hearts of the Czech people, as it does in those of the Slovaks. In effect it was in the Hotel Beau-Rivage that the Czech philosopher, Thomas Masaryk signed the treaty ratifying the creation of Czechoslovakia. One of the rooms of the hotel still carries the name of this leader of the independence movement who, a few months later, became the first president of the new Republic and remained in the position until 1935.

## **The Czech Awakening in Geneva**

It was in Geneva that Masaryk had found refuge already during the Great War. It was here that he began his struggle for an independent Czechoslovakia. His speech, given in 1915 on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Czech reformer Jean Hus – the symbol of the nation faced with the catholic oppression – made a great impression. The commemorative plaque, originally fixed on the wall of the former Salle de la Réformation where the celebration had taken place, then looked after by those in charge of the building, was given last year to the Beseda Slovan Association, which, in turn, presented it to the permanent Czech Mission at the United Nations. Expelled from the country because of his public actions against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Masaryk continued his combat abroad. His daughter married a Geneva resident and lived for many years on the shores of Lake Geneva.

## **A Czech in the country of clocks**

In 1839 another Czech, clockmaker François Czapek, had already made an impression on Geneva. In association with the Pole Antoine Norbert de Patek, he founded at 29-quai des Bergues the clock making company of Patek, Czapek & Co. At that time the firm, which was to become one of the most prestigious Swiss clock making companies under the name of Patek Philippe, made around two hundred watches a year. Due to strong differences between the two founders, François Czapek left the business in 1845 to carry on his career on his own, ceding his place to the Frenchman, Jean-Adrien Philippe. The Patek Philippe Museum can be visited at 7 rue des Vieux-Grenadiers, in the Plainpalais district of the city.

## **A century-old association**

The Beseda Slovan association, which today has around 200 members, both Czech and Slovak, was founded in 1901. It was this association which welcomed and supported Thomas Masaryk during his stay. In those days Czechs from all walks of life were to be found in Geneva : intellectuals, political refugees, tailors and other craftsmen. Other waves of immigrants arrived during the course of the XX<sup>th</sup> century,

intellectuals for the most part, fleeing the current regime. If the second generation of immigrants is, today, perfectly integrated into the Geneva society, the older generation continues to keep close ties with other members of the diaspora notably through the Beseda Slovan association which organises not only courses and conferences on historical themes, but also less formal meetings and activities. Even if there exists no typically Czech café in Geneva where the Euro matches can be watched, this will not prevent the small community from following the event keenly.

### **“Klapzuba’s Eleven”**

The Czechs have been passionate about football for many years. In effect, “Klapzuba’s Eleven’ was written in the 1920s by the Czech writer Eduard Bass, who tells the story of an imaginary football team. Translated by Marcela Salivarova-Bideau – Genevan film director of Czech origins –, the French version has just come out in the bookshops. For EURO 2008, this woman of the theatre has adapted the text for the stage, adding local elements, as the play also mentions the Geneva club FC Servette. «Les Onze de Klapzuba» will be performed at the Théâtre St-Gervais from 17 to 28 June. In reference to the Swiss and Czech teams, the play also evokes the match which opposed the FC Servette to Dukla Prague in 1961... match which cost the Geneva club its qualification.

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