The Queen and the Playwright: New photographic exhibition features rarely seen images from the Queen's visit to the Czech Republic

For immediate release

To mark 100 years since the birth of the late Queen Elizabeth II and 90 years since the birth of the first Czech President Václav Havel, the Czech Centre opens an outdoor exhibition on 21st April, the Queen's birthday, presenting a series of photographs from Her Majesty's state visit in the Czech Republic. The exhibition portrays the importance of the event which brought together the British monarch and the Czech playwright and prisoner of conscience turn President. The exhibition was prepared in cooperation with the Václav Havel Library and supported by the Sekyra Foudation.

The Queen and the Playwright: A Royal Visit at the Prague Castle features a series of photographs by Czech photographer Alan Pajer. The outdoor exhibition, on show at the public space outside the Czech Embassy in London – just a stone's throw away from Kensington Palace, looks back at the Queen's visit to the Czech Republic in March 1996. Considered one of the most important state visits in the country's modern history to this day, it marked a significant moment in the newly established Central-European country and was widely seen as one of the symbolic moments ending its communist past.

'Queen Elizabeth II's state visit to the Czech Republic was one of the most significant events that symbolically returned our country on the map of the Western world. It had taken place three years before we joined NATO and eight years before we became part of the EU', points out Václav Bartuška, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the UK.



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and President Václav Havel with his dog Ďula during Her Majesty's 1996 visit in Prague; photo by Alan Pajer

CZECH CENTRE LONDON
30 Kensington Palace Gardens, London W8 4QY
+44 (0) 207 836 3669 / info@czechcentre.org.uk
www.czechcentre.org.uk

'Each photograph in the exhibition tells a riveting story connecting European history with extraordinary personalities, whilst also revealing pure humanity thanks to Alan Pajer's sensitive approach to photography. I believe that the combination of these qualities guarantees that the exhibition will touch hearts and minds of Londoners who can explore it for free in the public space outside the Czech Embassy, close to the Kensington Palace and its adjacent gardens. The exhibition aims to communicate the importance of the Queen's visit to the Czech Republic back in 1996, which has had a ***lasting*** *impact on the relationship of our two countries and is part of its DNA',* says Tereza Šídlová, Director of the Czech Centre.

Queen Elizabeth II visited the Czech Republic accompanied by her husband Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at the invitation of the county's then president Václav Havel. HM Queen Elizabeth II was the first monarch to visit the young country which came into existence only three years earlier. During her three-day stay, the Queen met with members of the public, both in Prague and the Moravian city of Brno. She famously displayed her well-known love for dogs when meeting Ďula, the four-legged member of the Havel family. Also importantly, the visit brought historic closure: the Queen set the tone for future British-Czech relations when she addressed the UK's signing of the Munich Agreement (the 1938 document which surrendered large parts of Czechoslovakia to Hitler).

This exhibition is part of a series of commemorative events on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the birth of Václav Havel, organised by the Václav Havel Library in Prague. The making of the London exhibition was kindly supported by one of the partners of the Library, the Sekyra Foundation.

'I am honoured that the Sekyra Foundation can support this exhibition portraying the meeting between Queen Elizabeth II and President Václav Havel - a moment connecting politics, democratic values and historic experiences. It reminds us that cultural memory and inter-generational dialogue are the building foundations for a cohesive and confident society able to face current challenges. I trust that the exhibition will be an inspiring reminder of the Czech democratic legacy within wider European context', adds Luďek Sekyra, founder of Sekyra Foundation.

The Queen and the Playwright: A Royal Visit at the Prague Castle will be on show from 21 April until 12 June 2026.
Available 24/7 as a free outdoor exhibition on the fence of the Czech Embassy, W8 4QY.
Organised by Czech Centre London in partnership with Václav Havel Library in Prague and Embassy of the Czech Republic in London. Kindly supported by Sekyra Foundation.

For **PRESS QUERIES AND IMAGES** contact Veronika Blues: blues@czechcentre.org.uk

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