

# Cultural heritage after 1945

## NATIONALIZATION OF TREASURIES

Castles and chateaus in our country form a unique set, featuring top architecture, invaluable art, decorations and furniture, and historical books collected over the centuries by the aristocratic owners.

After WW2, the heritage sites became subjects of turbulent changes. In 1945, the property of Sudeten Germans was confiscated pursuant to the decrees of President Beneš; after the communist coup in 1948, all other sites experienced the same fate. In 1946, several alarming cases of plundering drove President Beneš to the establishment of the National Cultural Committee, with a difficult task: to pick up the most valuable confiscated sites, and use them to store the

furniture and collections from other property that was handed over to various state or collective organizations. The selected sites should have been reconstructed, restored and gradually made accessible for public.

Z. Wirth, outstanding art historian and heritage expert, was appointed the head of the committee. His selection was thorough indeed, and so was the basic record system of confiscated items. Eventually, the set of 150 publicly accessible castles and chateaus remained in care of expert heritage institutions even after the National Cultural Committee had been disbanded.

Despite the ongoing ideological pressure to convert the sites into theme museums, the preservationists succeeded in managing the property during the whole totalitarian era with no particular damages or losses. Even though part of the sites (50) and objects (about 250,000 inventory items) were returned to original owners pursuant to the Restitution Act from 2001, most of these castles and chateaus remain accessible for public. They show a lifestyle, education, and cultural interests of aristocracy and church elites from the past, and are extremely popular among domestic and international visitors.

