

## 40 YEARS SINCE THE DEMISE OF A FORGOTTEN HERO: VLADIMÍR VOCHOČ (1894–1985)

*Jakub Handrlica*

**Abstrakt:** In January 2025, we commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the death of Vladimír Vochoč (1894–1985), a Czechoslovak diplomat and associate professor at the Law Faculty in Prague in the inter-war period. V. Vochoč is best known to the public for his role in rescuing Jewish refugees, issuing passports during his consular work in Marseille, southern France. However, V. Vochoč was also the author of several valuable academic works, many of which are still helpful today. In 2016, V. Vochoč was posthumously awarded the Righteous Among the Nations Award for his work at the Czechoslovak Consulate in Marseille. In December 2024, the US Congress approved his inclusion among the sixty so-called rescuers who were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

**Resumé:** V lednu 2025 jsme si připomněli čtyřicáté výročí úmrtí Vladimíra Vochoče (1894–1985), československého diplomata a soukromého docenta pražské právnické fakulty. V. Vochoč je veřejnosti nejlépe známý díky svému podílu na záchraně židovských uprchlíků, který během své konzulární činnosti v jihofrancouzském Marseille vydával cestovní pasy. V. Vochoč byl ovšem také autorem řady cenných akademických děl, z nichž řada je dodnes využitelná. V r. 2016 byl V. Vochoč za svou činnost na československém konzulátu v Marseille in memoriam vyznamenán cenou Spravedlivý mezi národy. V prosinci 2024 americký kongres schválil jeho zařazení mezi šedesát tzv. zachránců (rescuers), kterým se uděluje Zlatá medaile Kongresu USA.

**Key words:** Vladimír Vochoč; Righteous Among the Nations Award; US Congress Gold Medal

### About the author:

**Jakub Handrlica** is Full Professor at the Law Faculty, Charles University, Prague. Email: jakub.handrlica@prf.cuni.cz .

On 12 December 2024, the US Congress adopted a unique piece of legislation, entitled the Forgotten Heroes of the Holocaust Congressional Gold Medal Act.<sup>1</sup> This Act recognises and honours 60 diplomats who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. This bipartisan bill awards a single Congressional Gold Medal collectively to the next of kin of these diplomats. The list also includes one diplomat, who was strongly connected with the Law Faculty of Prague. Vladimír Vochoč (1894–1985) was both a graduate of this Law Faculty and an associate professor of international law there in the interwar period. This short note aims to remind us of this half-forgotten personality forty years after his death.<sup>2</sup>

Vladimír Vochoč was born on 14 July 1894 in Třebchovice pod Orebem, where his father Otakar Vochoč worked as a railway official. At this time, O. Vochoč was involved in

<sup>1</sup> Public Law No. 118–149, 118th Congress.

<sup>2</sup> This short note is based upon my much larger article, which was published earlier as HANDRLICA, J. Vladimír Vochoč (1894–1985). Odkaz československého právníka a diplomata [Vladimír Vochoč (1894–1985). The legacy of a Czechoslovak lawyer and diplomat](2024) 12 *Studia iuridica cassoviensia* 99.

the progressive movement, close to Tomáš G. Masaryk. V. Vochoč received his secondary education in various places where his father worked - first in Prague and then in Jičín, where he passed his high school leaving exam with distinction in 1913. V. Vochoč completed his university studies in law from 1913 to 1918 at Charles University in Prague. During his studies, he was most influenced by lectures on international law, given by Professor Antonín Hobza. In the years 1915 and 1916, he also attended lectures at the universities of Berlin, Vienna, Leipzig, and Halle. V. Vochoč completed his studies in law and graduated on 29 July 1918.

From 1921, he worked in the legal section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the newly established Czechoslovak Republic, which was founded and at that time managed by his former teacher, Professor A. Hobza. In 1923, V. Vochoč became a member of the delegation that represented the Czechoslovak Republic in international arbitration over the Spiš municipality of Javorina. The following year, he participated in the international arbitration over the territory of the city of Šomošská Nová Ves. In the 1930s, he was twice entrusted with the management of Czechoslovak embassies during the absence of the regular ambassador - from 1932 to 1935, he managed the Czechoslovak embassy in Tirana, and in 1937, the Czechoslovak embassy in Kaunas.<sup>3</sup> In the 1930s, he was also involved with the newly emerging aviation law, especially in the organizations CITEA (*Comité International Technique d'Experts Juridiques Aériens*) and CINA (*Comission International Navigations Aérienne*).

In 1938, V. Vochoč became the Czechoslovak consul in Marseille, southern France. In this destination, he was caught up in the fateful events of the late 1930s - the Munich Agreement, the establishment of the Second Czechoslovak Republic, and the occupation of the Czech lands by Nazi Germany in March 1939. Following this, V. Vochoč was called upon by the headquarters to hand over the Marseille consulate to the German authorities – just like other diplomatic representatives of the Czechoslovak Republic abroad. However, in the same vein as the then Czechoslovak ambassador in Paris, Štefan Osuský, V. Vochoč refused to do so. Both the French authorities and subsequently (after the defeat of France in June 1940) the Vichy regime tacitly tolerated the existence of the Czechoslovak consulate in Marseille. It was during this period that V. Vochoč issued Czechoslovak passports to a hitherto unknown number of emigrants who otherwise faced arrest by the German authorities for political or racial reasons. Thanks to V. Vochoč's cooperation with the consulates of Portugal and China, the issued passports were provided with Portuguese and Chinese visas. In March 1941, V. Vochoč was arrested by the Vichy police and interned in the French countryside. This ended the activities of the Czechoslovak consulate in Marseille. He managed to escape from internment and reached London via Lisbon, where he spent the rest of the war.

After the end of World War II, V. Vochoč was appointed Czechoslovak delegate to the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco, where he worked from April to June 1945. In November 1947, he was appointed legal advisor to the Albanian government in its dispute with Great Britain regarding the Strait of Corfu. In 1953, V. Vochoč was arrested and the following year prosecuted in a fabricated trial with a group around the former representative of the French car manufacturer Renault in Czechoslovakia, Karel Salač. V. Vochoč was subsequently convicted and sentenced to thirteen years in prison. He was

<sup>3</sup> In the interwar period, Kaunas served as a capital of Lithuania.

released from his sentence on amnesty in 1960. He was rehabilitated in 1964 and died in 1985.

The period V. Vochoč spent as a consul in Marseille became popular to the broader audience in the Czech Republic thanks to a novel *La Symphonie du nouveau monde*, written by Lenka Horňáková – Civade.<sup>4</sup> However, his contribution to the legal scholarship is less known and deserves to be remembered here:

In addition to his diplomatic career, V. Vochoč was also intensely involved in the interwar legal academia. His first publication, in which he reflected on his experiences from the Paris Peace Conference, was a short monograph entitled *Peace Treaties 1919–1920*.<sup>5</sup> In this monograph, he provided a basic overview of the peace treaties concluded with Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey after the First World War, especially with regard to the resolution of state borders and the citizenship of the successor states. While this publication can now be found only in specialized libraries, V. Vochoč's contributions to the monumental Dictionary of Czechoslovak Public Law are much more accessible. V. Vochoč contributed to the Dictionary throughout the interwar period. His first contribution was a relatively brief dictionary entry dealing with the annexation of foreign territory.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that the issue is topical today. The first volume of the Dictionary contains four more of his entries. They deal with territorial cession (the transfer of part of a state's territory to another state), the powers of delimitation commissions established for the purpose of determining the course of state borders, diplomatic representatives and finally the exclusion of specific persons from the scope of application of national law regulations (extraterritoriality). During the 1930s, V. Vochoč wrote four more dictionary entries. To the second volume of the Dictionary, he contributed entries on the concept of state responsibility in international law and on the acquisition of citizenship by option. In the third volume, we find his dictionary entry dealing with the Czechoslovak port zones in Hamburg and Szczecin. The very last dictionary entry by V. Vochoč concerned the topic of disarmament and was published in the fourth volume of the Dictionary in 1938.

In 1930, V. Vochoč published a monograph entitled *Optional Clause at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919–1920*.<sup>7</sup> This monograph was submitted to the Law Faculty in Prague as his *Habilitationschrift* – that is, to obtain the right to give lectures to the students of the university. He received this right in 1933, and since that time, he gave lectures on international law at this Faculty.

The last academic work of V. Vochoč, which deserves to be mentioned here, is his contribution to the *Liber amicorum* for his teacher, Professor A. Hobza. V. Vochoč not only served as one of the editors here but also contributed with a study on *The recognition of Soviet Russia*.<sup>8</sup> This contribution was very close to A. Hobza, who had long advocated for

<sup>4</sup> The novel was firstly published in French by Alma Éditreur (Paris, 2019) and subsequently in Czech as *Symfonie o novém světě*. Praha: Argo, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> VOCHOČ, V. *Mírové smlouvy 1919–1920*, [Peace treaties 1919–1920], Praha: Vydáno péčí Ministerstva školství a národní osvěty ve Státním nakladatelství, 1924.

<sup>6</sup> VOCHOČ, V. Aneksie. In: HÁCHA, E., HOBZA, A., HOETZEL, J., WEYR, F., LAŠTOVKA, K. (eds.): *Slovník veřejného práva československého. Svazek I.*, [Dictionary of Czechoslovak Public Law. Volume I.], Brno: Nakladatelství Polygrafia a Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1929, 69.

<sup>7</sup> VOCHOČ, V. *Klausule opční (do mírové konference pařížské r. 1919–1920)*, [Option clause (until the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–1920)], Praha: Knihovna věd právních a státních, 1930.

<sup>8</sup> VOCHOČ, V. Uznání Sovětského Ruska. [Recognition of Soviet Russia]. In: SATURNÍK, T., TUREČEK, J.,

diplomatic recognition of the Soviet state by the Czechoslovak Republic. At the time of the publication, the topic became extremely topical: The republican regime in Spain established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in July 1933. In November 1933, the Soviet regime was diplomatically recognised by the United States of America. In 1934 and 1935, the Soviet Union was recognised by Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Albania, and Belgium. The only state in our geographical area that did not establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union during this period was Yugoslavia. In his article, V. Vochoč analysed the development of international relations that preceded the process of recognition of the Soviet regime. At the same time, he gave a detailed description of various forms of cooperation between the Soviet Union and European states in the previous period. Vochoč's contribution to the *Liber Amicorum for A. Hobza* is not only the result of a meticulous analysis of available documents, but also significant contemporary testimony to the state of international law in the mid-1930s.

Despite his extensive publishing activity, V. Vochoč did not become a full professor in the interwar period. During World War II, he tried to emigrate to the USA and obtain a professorship at one of the American universities.<sup>9</sup> This effort was also unsuccessful. In post-war Czechoslovakia, the emerging communist regime did not allow him to work in the academic sphere.

V. Vochoč died in Prague on 4 January 1985. His achievements were accomplished only after the Velvet Revolution. In 2016, he was posthumously awarded the Righteous Among the Nations Award for his work at the Czechoslovak Consulate in Marseille. The library of the Consulate bears today the name *Library of Vladimír Vochoč*. In 2024, his name was added to the list of sixty heroes awarded the Congressional Gold Medal – together with Aristides de Sousa Mendes and Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (Pope John XXIII.).

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VOCHOČ, V., VOŠTA, L. (eds.): *Pocta k šedesátým narozeninám univerzitního profesora Antonína Hobzy*, [Tribute to the sixtieth birthday of university professor Antonín Hobza], Praha: Nákladem Bursíka & Kohouta, 1936, 98–117.

<sup>9</sup> HÁJEK, A. JUDr. Vladimír Vochoč. *Československý konzul v Marseille 1938–1941*. Rigorózní práce. [Czechoslovak Consul in Marseille 1938 – 1941. Rigorous thesis.]. Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2009, at p. 73.

## ROUNDTABLE REPORT: FORUM SHOPPING: BALANCING PARTY AUTONOMY AND LEGAL CERTAINTY?

*Dominika Moravcová*<sup>1</sup>

On 14 April 2025, the Faculty of Law of Trnava University hosted, under its auspices and on its premises in Trnava, an international roundtable discussion entitled ‘Forum Shopping: Balancing Party Autonomy and Legal Certainty?’. The roundtable was organised in cooperation with the University of Bologna, specifically with the involvement of Professor Michele A. Lupoi, an internationally recognised authority in the field of cross-border litigation and civil procedure. Professor Lupoi chaired the entire discussion.

Professor Lupoi, who also serves as the Director of the Summer School on Cross-border litigation and international arbitration organised by the University of Bologna at the Ravenna Campus, travelled to Trnava in person, accompanied by Professor Marco Farina from the Università Europea di Roma. In addition to the distinguished guests from Italy, the roundtable featured active contributions from Professor Kristian Csach, Professor Tomáš Gábriš, and Assistant Professor Dominika Moravcová from Trnava University, as well as Assistant Professor Ľubica Gregová Širicová from the Faculty of Law at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. The event was streamed live via Microsoft Teams, enabling passive international participation from attendees across various jurisdictions.

The central theme of the discussion was forum shopping, with each contributor offering a distinct perspective on the topic. Professor Lupoi formally opened the roundtable in his capacity as Chair and guided the overall discussion, later contributing his own insights on various aspects of forum shopping in light of EU instruments of international civil procedure. Professor Csach explored the role of specialised commercial chambers and critically reflected on their influence in international commercial litigation, referencing numerous practical examples from across Europe. Professor Gábriš approached the topic through the lens of sports law, highlighting the variety of fora available for sports-related disputes and the existence of *sui generis* adjudicatory bodies in this domain. Professor Farina, an expert in international arbitration, analysed forum shopping specifically from the perspective of arbitral proceedings. Assistant Professor Širicová examined the opposite dimension of the topic, namely, the restriction of litigation options in the context of selected legal instruments governing commercial relationships, including the EU Due Diligence Directive. Finally, Assistant Professor Dominika Moravcová concluded the roundtable with a presentation on the practical implications of the *Inkreal* judgment in the context of the European Small Claims Procedure.

Following the conclusion of all presentations, a lively and engaging discussion took place, with participation from both in-person and online attendees. The roundtable did not represent a one-off academic exchange; on the contrary, it laid the groundwork for future collaboration among participants. Ongoing joint initiatives in the field of international private and procedural law, as well as transnational litigation, are already taking shape. We look forward to reporting on the next event in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> JUDr. Ing. Dominika Moravcová, PhD., MBA, LL.M. is currently an assistant professor at the Faculty of Law, Trnava University in Trnava.