Capital Letter Spelling

The spelling of many words and phrases is given by a long tradition (e.g. inhabitant names are capitalized: Čech, Moravan, Francouz, Ostravan, lower case letters are used to denote members of political parties: lidovec, občanský demokrat). It is important to realize that each language has its own principles of capitalization, therefore when translating foreign-language texts, the original language appearance cannot be followed, but instead the rules valid in the Czech language are used (in English European Union, in Czech Evropská unie; in English European Economic Community, in Czech Evropské hospodářské společenství).

The capitalization is the most difficult area of spelling, as there is more than only one spelling principle on how to write proper names: the names of streets/squares/waterfront/classes/bridge/orchards (ulice/náměstí/nábřeží/třída/sady Míru) are written in a different way compared to names of settlements (Sídliště Míru - here it is about the name of a city district for which different rules are valid).

When deciding whether to write a given word or phrase with capital or lower case letters, in Czech, unfortunately, it cannot often be done without factual knowledge. For example, in one-word expressions, you have to know whether one is talking about about Jews (as members of a certain religion) = židé, or Jews (like the Germans, Czechs or the members of a nation) = Židé. Regarding multi-word names, it is necessary to know whether it is an official name or not, e.g. Ostravská univerzita (this is the official name of University of Ostrava), while brněnská univerzita (because the official name of the university in Brno is Masaryk University). It is necessary to know what the phrase means: Černý most = proper name of the bridge (Black Bridge), Černý Most = proper name of city district (Black Bridge) named after it. It is necessary to know whether the adjective is a part of the geographical name, e.g. Severní Amerika (Northern America), or not, e.g. severní Evropa (Northern Europe).

Capital letters can also be used for expressing respect (e.g. Vy, Váš = You, Your in correspondence, Bůh = God in religious texts). For Czech, in contrast to English, however, it is not typical to capitalize the beginning of the phrase you want to emphasize. In this case, we choose a different font.

Some proper names when used figuratively become common nouns, e.g. to byla havaj = "it was relaxing", ten je učiněný harpagon = "he is a real miser".

In multi-word phrases, only the first word is usually capitalized: Orlické hory, Severní ledový oceán, Blízký východ, Spojené státy americké, Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, České vysoké učení technické, Komerční banka, Listina základních práv a svobod, Prodaná nevěsta. There has to be a reason to capitalize other (all or some) words of multi-word name, for example Julské Alpy, Severní Amerika, Nové Město, Kostelec u Křížků, Divadlo Komedie.

No official list of proper names can exist. In names whose spelling is dependent on factual knowledge, we can only rely on encyclopedias, dictionaries, geographic, and certain other special manuals.

Summarizing Capitalization Rules:

1. One-word proper names are capitalized:
Evropa, Afrika, Petr, Marie, Brno, Praha, Norsko
2. In multi-word proper names, the first word is usually capitalized:
Středozemní moře, Suezský průplav, Liga mistrů, Lidové noviny, Pravidla českého pravopisu
3. If a proper name is a part of multi-word expression it is capitalized:
Vysoké Tatry, Univerzita Palackého
4. In multi-word proper names of populated places, all letters are capitalized, except for prepositions:
Nové Město na Moravě, Hradec Králové, Kutná Hora
5. If there is a common name in front of the multi-word expression it is written with a lower case letter:
Nové Město na Moravě, Hradec Králové, Kutná Hora
6. If there is a preposition at the beginning of a proper name, both preposition and the expression are capitalized:
sídliště Stodůlky, třída Kapitána Jaroše, kino Dukla

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