

Esteemed Mr. Chairman,  
Esteemed senators,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like above all to express my joy that we have all met here at the upper chamber of the Parliament of the Czech Republic on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the Security Services Archive so as to evaluate the role and position of institutions of historical memory in our countries. At the same time, I would like to thank the chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, Milan Štěch, for giving his patronage to what for us is an important event, and to Senator Miroslav Nenutil for chairing it.

When the Institute was set up five years ago, its founder expressed the belief at an international forum that it would very soon rank among respected institutions of similar type, including the Office of the Federal Commissioner for the records of the Ministry for State Security of the GDR in Berlin and Poland's Institute of National Remembrance, and others. Allow me to declare that that has unequivocally been achieved, despite all the understandable complications linked to the difficult foundation of both institutions.

The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the Security Services Archive which it oversees have filled a gap in our public sphere, concluding, in a way that our predecessors failed to manage, a process begun at the start of the 1990s. That is, to concentrate extensive materials that originated through the activities of the security services of the Communist and partly the Nazi totalitarian regimes in one spot; to declassify them, conform to the archives law and open them up completely to researchers and begin systematic research.

Perhaps the most important outcome of this difficult and equivocal process is the fact that the Czech public, including the political community, have ceased to fear archival materials and documents (and, respectively, the information contained within them) that originated in the Room 101 that was the totalitarian regime. The fact that there is a better solution than leaving such materials in the hands of the central organs of power – what's more, frequently classified as top secret – has been confirmed. The creation of two civil institutions joined within one chapter of the state budget and whose basic tasks are set by law has proven to be far more effective for society.

The rejection of previous bureaucratic procedures, the cessation of ineffective and poor-quality digitisation of a small part of the State Security and Military Counterintelligence file agenda and a switch to IT technology suited to the 21<sup>st</sup> century have enabled the successful management of a huge number of tasks. To offer a random example: In a short period, various kinds of information system taken over from the ministries of the interior, defence and justice and the security services have been successfully brought together in one massive Security Services Archive system containing five million records; these are used by researchers, by officials fulfilling the so-called lustration laws, in the carrying out of security enquiries and investigations of the crimes of Communism, etc.

From the beginning, the Institute has methodically focused on subjects that no academic or research institution in the Czech Republic has to date systematically explored: the development of the security forces as a key agent of power; their influence on the policies of the totalitarian regime; the documentation of Nazi and Communist crimes; the staffing of the organs of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia; cooperation with the KGB in particular; the activities of the intelligence agencies abroad; the anti-Nazi and anti-Communist resistance, including the role played by Czechoslovak citizens on foreign battlefields; and many other areas.

Without our research work and organisation of important international conferences, it is certain that Act no. 262/2011 Coll. on participants in the resistance and opposition to Communism would never have been approved. Unfortunately, however, because it was passed so late many resisters did not live to see it. Linked to that law are the current activities of the Institute's top class digitisation office; it will soon have reached 30 million digitised files (around a tenth of the estimated number of pages at the Security Services Archive) and ranks among the highest quality and cheapest in the Czech Republic.

Our Institute has filled – and I would like to emphasise this – a surprising gap in education, in particular among teachers of modern history. Unsurprisingly, we have managed to acquire significant grant aid in this area. In line with the law, we also devote effort to presenting the results of our research activities to the general public.

From the beginning, it was the Institute's ambition to create an international institution that would defend our common interests at the European level. The task of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, established two years ago in Prague under our patronage with the backing of three prime ministers and operating out of the Institute, is to continue looking for active partners in the west and south of the continent and to transform itself into an institution financed from the EU budget.

We are also doing our best to be actively involved in a network of archive institutes administering the archival materials of former security services. Indeed, our chairmanship culminated with the hosting of a meeting of the network at the Institute yesterday.

For those I have mentioned and other reasons, I regard the continued work of the Institute and the Security Services Archive as immensely important, beneficial to the public and irreplaceable to our society. My conviction is reinforced by feedback from representatives of the democratic parties in our Parliament. At roughly the halfway point of my directorship, allow me at the same time to state that both of our institutions – fulfilling their legally established duties to the maximum in view of the financial means provided – have never been in better shape in terms of staff or expertise.

On the other hand, it is of course not possible to overlook the fact that not only our output but even our very existence are sometimes subject to criticism and condemnation. Suffice it, however, to point to the findings of the Czech Constitutional Court, which stated that in a pluralistic academic environment the legally established Institute has fulfilled a legitimate public interest.

The Institute and the Archive are not to blame for the fact that we are regarded by some Communists and their allies as an instrument of political struggle. It is not possible to explain to these critics that our right to examine the evidence of totalitarian regimes ends with their fall at the turn of 1989 and 1990, and should therefore bear no relation to the political reality of the start of 2013. Another group of critics hide their disagreement with the existence of the Institute and the Archive behind personal attacks on several of my colleagues.

However, as an advocate of building ideological bridges across rivers of turbulent opinion, I declare with full responsibility that I am prepared, whenever and wherever, to discuss, defend and passionately argue the value of our activities with anybody with whom such an exchange is worthwhile.

Thank you for your attention.