

Esteemed Mr. Chairman,
Esteemed foreign guests,
Esteemed colleagues,

Allow me to begin by apologising on behalf of the director of the Security Services Archive, PhDr. Zlatuše Kukánová, who is unable to take part in our seminar for health reasons. She sends you all her very best regards.

This morning I am faced with the far from easy task of briefly assessing the significance of the work of the Security Services Archive over the last five years.

The creation of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the Security Services Archive was preceded by a lengthy series of negotiations and discussions that divided experts into two sometimes irreconcilable camps. Its founders looked for inspiration abroad, in particular in neighbouring post-Communist countries. In the Czech Republic, the journey led from a proposal for a Nation's Memory Institute in November 2005 via a complex amended proposal approved by the Chamber of Deputies at the start of May 2007 to the approval, in June of that year, of Act no. 181/2007 Coll. by the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Both institutions, the Archive and the Institute, were established by the same law, as their joint mission has been and remains to make accessible and process scientifically documents from the period of repression.

From the beginning, the Security Services Archive, which after five years of existence ranks among the youngest of Czech archives, was faced with a number of tasks. The first was to launch a series of discussions and practical steps. It was necessary in a few months to delimit 17 linear km of index cards and registration aids, documents and archival materials from various institutions (in particular the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, including the military intelligence, the Ministry of Justice, the Security Information Service and the Office for Foreign Relations and Information); this material dated from 1945 to 1990, and had to be concentrated at the new institution. Looking back, it can be described as an extremely difficult job.

In line with the law, the necessary financial means, movable and immovable property and staff number were delimited by 1.2.2008. Along with the delimited documents, staff came to the Archive who were experienced in searching through the materials in question; unfortunately, however, very few had studied archiving. One key problem, finding suitable storage space and concentrating the archival collections "under one roof", was not successfully resolved. The Security Services Archive was therefore forced to take over unsuitable buildings of the former Archive of the Ministry of the Interior at Na Struze in Prague 1 and Kanice in Brno; it also acquired the right to use premises

in Prague's Kobylišy and Braník that did not offer wholly appropriate conditions for the proper administration of archival materials and documents.

The research community began to link the Archive in particular with materials relating to the activities of the Czechoslovak, respectively Federal and Czech, Ministry of the Interior, the files of the State Security (StB) and the materials of the Public Security and Ministry of the Interior forces. A drawback of the transferred material was the fact it had been processed to varying degrees by the originators. The Archive had to cope with this problem and prepare the ground for understanding and coming to terms with the recent past.

The new institution also took over cooperation in the provision of information to agencies involved in criminal proceedings, state bodies responsible for security and administrative authorities. It became, therefore, the closest partner of the Ministry of the Interior in the provision of source materials for the issuing of screening certificates. The Archive also deals with requests from the National Security Office and the Police Presidium of the Czech Republic, as well as working with the Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism and other institutions. Without the establishment of the Institute and the Archive, it would not have been possible to approve and apply Act no. 262/2011 Coll. on participants in the resistance and opposition to Communism, as without the centralisation of archival materials and the creation of the necessary system it would hardly have been possible to fulfil it. In order to process requests from the Ministry of Defence, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian regimes has participated in the systematic digitisation of archival materials attached to expert opinions for the ministry's other needs. The entirety of the Archive's official agenda represents over 80 percent of all requests processed.

The remainder covers classic research requests, as the Archive's priority is to make archival materials accessible to both specialists and the general public. Unlike our foreign partners, we have a very liberal approach to the publication of information. The majority of archival materials are accessible under the law on archiving and records services, which guarantees equal access without differentiation and without blacking out certain data; this differs from the making accessible of files under the law on the disclosure of files of the former Stb (Act no. 140/1996 Coll. as amended by Act no. 107/2002 Coll.). However, in no case can it be confused with free access to information under Act no. 106/1999 Coll.

The concentration of practically all preserved StB and Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff documents and their extraordinarily liberal disclosure – openness, in other words – has led to absolute transparency in society. It is thus relieved of prejudice and doubts and the spreading of unverified suspicions and disinformation, against which there would otherwise be little adequate defence, apart from the possible objection that our documents are deliberately used to denigrate and discredit people, for instance in a political

struggle, which the director of the Institute, Mgr. Daniel Herman, spoke about. I believe that this equality and transparency creates a favourable atmosphere among the research community and that not even our critics could imagine a different situation in the form of a reduction or restriction of access to the materials and information administered. According to the relevant legislation, the task of the Archive is to gather documents, process them, make them accessible, protect them, look after their physical condition and so forth. It is necessary to point out, however, that the main responsibility for interpreting them lies with researchers alone.

In the five years that the Archive has been in existence, it has created three study rooms for both applicants searching for information and traditional “archival” researchers working on the most varied of scientific and specialised subjects. It has been possible while processing requests to gradually make use of the results of systematic digitisation; this means researchers can study requested materials in electronic form or take home a watermarked copy on a modern electronic carrier.

Allow me to make a number of pertinent references to statistics. To date, 9,000 people have come to our study rooms, on a total of 22,600 visits. The annual average is therefore around 1,760 visitors and 4,500 visits. Interest in studying the material administered is not falling. For comparison, the National Archive, which administers around 10 times as much archival materials, has been visited by only 2,500 to 2,650 people annually, with visit numbers reaching 12,500. Every year the Security Services Archive has dealt with around 1,200 requests (not including those pertaining to Act no. 262/2011 Coll.), while information on over 120,000 people has been provided for official and research purposes in the screening systems. The institution’s own restoration office, which boasts unique Neschen mass deacidification technology, has been built up gradually and has treated tens of thousands of sheets of archival material.

Another long-term task has been and will be to facilitate simpler, faster and more thorough access to information and an overall improvement in service for researchers. Ways forward include the digitisation of archival materials and the further development of the screening system, electronic archive and web presentation. It should be emphasised that all of the activities mentioned also involve protecting the physical state of the archival materials, slowing their gradual degradation and meeting the need to reduce the cost of restoration. Some have expressed dissatisfaction, calling for the faster submission of archival materials. Unlike most Czech archives, we have to see to official requests in an “accelerated process”, sometimes in less than 48 hours. Unlike those archives, we provide researchers and applicants with a complete service in the form of detailed research across all collections. As I mentioned at the start of this talk, this situation is chiefly due to the fact that it had been processed to varying degrees by the originators. Some doubters could of course offer their

own interpretation of this statement; I'll leave that to their consciences, however.

I am aware that it is not possible in just a few minutes to cover the entire spectrum of the Security Services Archive activities, such as our presentations at both domestic and international level. We are pleased that we have managed to intensify our relations with partner institutions (such as with the Ludwig Boltzman Institute in work on the activities of the Czechoslovak intelligence services in Austria); to establish new and useful contacts in the Baltic States and Slovenia; and to participate in prestigious workshops in Europe and Latin America. The Archive is a member of the International Council of Archives (ICA) and is one of the co-founders of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, which coordinates studies and projects aimed at coming to terms with the totalitarian past at European level. It has symbolic representation in the form of three members of the Platform's supervisory board and expert archives group, which among other things advocates for the protection of Europe's cultural heritage. We believe that this activity, too, will put down roots on the European scene.

We believe that in future it will be possible to obtain finances from European Union funds or other non-budgetary sources and to carry out a joint international project of virtual reconstruction of the manually destroyed files of the former military counter intelligence from the 1980s with Berlin's Fraunhofer Institut (Institut Produktionsanlagen und Konstruktionstechnik), allowing their contents to be identified.

Though we have achieved numerous successes in our first five years, we have also in our work encountered an uncomprehending environment and partial failures. I believe that we have gradually managed to overcome them and to learn from them. The Archive has faced a critical situation regarding its premises since its inception, and despite all talks to date it has not been possible to find a suitable building or construct a less operationally demanding, purpose-made building suited to the storing of archival materials. Nevertheless, at the end of first half of 2012, the critical situation regarding premises gradually stabilised.

Ladies and gentlemen, if the aim of this meeting is to clarify the role and significance of institutions of historical memory and to address the basic question of their sense, meaning and position in society, it should be stated unequivocally that the Security Services Archive rightfully ranks among such institutions. An individual Archive office deal with a total of 16 registered agendas, under the register of rights and obligations. The Archive's standing among other Czech archives is, in view of its activities and administration of a specific type of archival material, unique and irreplaceable. Given the configuration of these processes, it is not possible to include the Archive among standard academic-research institutions in the Czech Republic or to merge it with the National Archive before 2030, as a decline in the majority of agendas

dealt with is not expected in the coming years. We believe that in the five years it has existed the Security Services Archive has built up a stable position and, through its work, delivered a forceful reply to doubters. The Archive is an open institution with specific tasks, responsibilities and duties towards the state and society. I am convinced that, given the creation of the necessary conditions, the Archive will fulfil them with honour. Esteemed Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the Archive's work at the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention and understanding.