

Securityarchives Portal

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Mission Statement

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I. Initial situation

1. After the fall of the Communist dictatorships in the former German Democratic Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria, state-operated agencies were founded that are responsible for the archival legacy of the former secret-police agencies and other repressive bodies of those dictatorships; these are to ensure the general public's access to these documents.

2. The major targets of these institutions are to:

- * facilitate individual access to files and data containing personal information of those persons formerly subject to repression by the secret police;
- * ensure a comprehensive educational and historical analysis of the working principles of communist secret police bodies based on scientific findings;
- * ensure that the files are managed and made available in keeping with the principles of the rule of law.

3. The formation of these official authorities and the history of the opening of the files took a different course in our countries: some have been in existence since the early 1990s, while others have only been established in recent years. The guiding principle of the work of all these agencies is the will of the respective parliaments to pass their own laws pertaining to the archival legacy of the Communist secret police, which do justice to their own special circumstances and ensure the management and accessibility of the files under the rule of law. In this context, it should be emphasized that all these institutions are independent and not part of the general state-run archival management bodies.

4. In the past several years, an active bi- and multilateral co-operation between our institutions has developed on various levels. Other state- and non-state-operated institutions and organizations (for example, institutions that carry out historical research) are frequently involved in this co-operation.

II. Foundation of a European Network of Official Authorities in Charge of Secret Police Files

We, the representatives of these institutions, have recognized the necessity to strengthen our co-operation and express our common purpose in a European Network. In this process, we follow up on the initiative expressed in Resolutions 1096 (1996) and 1481 (2006) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (among others), which emphasize the importance of the prosecution of crimes committed by Communist regimes, inform the public of those crimes and open the secret police archives maintained by those dictatorships. As state-operated institutions with a legally codified mandate to enable access to these files, we in the European Union seek to clearly state our common position on these issues. We seek to be a forum for the mutual exchange and transfer of information; this applies to the archives, the legal regulations, historical-political education and public relations, as well as research. With the establishment of this European network, we would like to make clear that these issues do not encompass merely a national context.

They involve coming to terms with the past in a European, an international context. We want to stress the importance of opening the files and access to these files, which is regulated in accordance with the rule of law, as well as the importance of independent research and widespread information about the secret police of dictatorships and their representatives. Our common aim is to support each other in the fulfilment of these tasks. We desire to guarantee full independence for archival research. Any kind of political instrumentalization must be prevented. We want to advocate publicly for this together.

In this process, we acknowledge that the nations concerned are following - notwithstanding the common basis of their aims - different approaches, for example, in their internal structure, in regulating legal and factual access to the files, in assigning jurisdiction for the investigation of crimes committed by dictatorial regimes, as well as in lustration and vetting in politics and administration.

In the context of a multi-faceted landscape of state- and non-state-operated agencies, institutions and initiatives involving research institutes, foundations, memorial sites, museums, and victims' groups - our European Network serves to promote the common aim of enhancing efforts on academic, social, and political levels to come to terms with the past. This will be done with regard to the differing experiences with repression which the countries involved have had. Particular importance should be attached to independent academic research and the historical-political education of, in particular, European youth. The purpose of this network is to involve other agencies/institutions and initiatives in its work - and to find suitable forms of participation.

We are convinced that access to the secret police files is an important aspect of the transformation processes taking place resulting from the fall of dictatorships worldwide. Therefore, the network aims to define minimum requirements for access to secret police files kept by dictatorships.

In order to inform the public, the network will first create comparative surveys of access to the files, the legal principles governing this access, and the structure of the responsible institutions, as well as of the utilization of their services. The network will focus on the subject-specific, independent fulfilment of tasks in order to eliminate the possibility of any kind of political instrumentalization.

III. Working Methods of the Network

1. Annual conferences

The network will conduct an annual conference at which the management bodies of the institutions involved discuss important issues associated with their functions and the overall process of coming to terms with the past in their countries. In this process, the pan-European dimension of these issues is intended to play a particularly significant role.

The country which chairs the network (on a rotating basis) should serve as the host of the conference in that particular year. Public events will accompany this annual conference to serve to increase public awareness of issues related to this review process. In this context, it would be desirable to include additional agencies/institutions and initiatives which are involved in this process of coming to terms with the past.

The proceedings of the annual conference will be documented and published in an appropriate way.

2. Coordinating group

The network will establish a coordinating group consisting of representatives from the institutions involved that will:

- * ensure constant and direct communication;
- * prepare the annual conference together with the hosting authority;

* develop a system for collecting, providing, and updating basic information on the authorities involved.

3. Central organization

The institution that is to host the next annual conference will chair the network for the one-year term leading up to that conference.



Soviet War Cemetery, Warsaw

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