

Churches and religious associations behind the „Iron Curtain“. Part two: 1956 – 1968
International scientific conference

Organizer: Nation's Memory Institute

Co-organizers: Institute of National Remembrance (Poland), Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Czech Republic); Committee of National Remembrance (Hungary)

Venue: Bratislava

Date: 24 – 25 September 2024

The year 1956 represents a significant historical milestone in the history of Central Eastern Europe. The defeat of the Hungarian uprising and the riots in Poland, as well as the harsh reprisals that followed, brought to an end a phase of open resistance to communist regimes in the Soviet bloc states. Gradually, the attitude of the West began to change. Although it condemned the harsh reprisals from the position of anti-communism, it accepted the bipolar division of the world and the current Soviet sphere of influence. The changing international situation, especially the new Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence, which was gradually enforced from 1956 onwards, signaled that the ideologically antagonistic blocs were preparing for long-term coexistence. The gradual easing of international political tensions resulted in a policy of détente in the late 1960s.

At the same time, the pontificate of Pius XII, who refused direct dialogue with communist governments, was ending, and the era of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI was beginning. One of the global consequences of the attitudes of these Popes was the dialogue with Marxism, the Second Vatican Council and finally, the Vatican's policy toward Eastern countries and the beginning of direct negotiations with communist governments in the 1960s.

In this changed situation, the approach of the communist regimes to questions of religion also partially changed. After a period of harsh reprisals, the liquidation of church structures and religious communities, and the overall application of power monopoly over the churches, a period of consolidation of power in the form of constant control and supervision of the churches emerged. Infiltration of the clergy, methods of intimidation and recruitment of secret collaborators were increasingly applied. Communist regimes purposely established collaborationist organizations of so-called patriotic priests to break up the churches from within. On the other hand, the activities of the so-called secret church also developed, but are not sufficiently mapped. The Second Vatican Council, which was also attended by episcopal delegations from the Soviet bloc states, was a significant event in the life of the Catholic Church and believers, and the attitude of the Communist regimes towards the Second Vatican Council, in general, was the subject of widespread scholarly interest. A significant part of the history of the Cold War in the given period is the activities of exile organizations from East-Central Europe, which the communist regimes perceived as ideological opponents.

The conference organizers aim to analyze the situation of churches and religious communities in the European countries of the Eastern Bloc in the years 1956 and 1968 in a broader context. The conference will aim to specify the similarities and differences between their activities, state policy towards churches, and the situation of followers and organizations of individual churches at home and in the diaspora. It will also focus on the analysis of the power

mechanisms and modifications of the repressive policies of communist regimes in the struggle against churches in states whose ideological premise was the struggle against religion.

The conference will cover the following topics:

- analysis of the power mechanisms of communist regimes in the struggle against churches and religious communities;
- repressive methods employed by communist regimes against churches;
- political secret police and their part in the persecution of the churches;
- the policy of the Holy See and the World Council of Churches towards states and nations behind the Iron Curtain;
- the phenomenon of formation and activities of the so-called secret church;
- Protestant churches and smaller denominations in the struggle against communism,
- Rome as one of the centers of anti-communist exile.

The outcome of the conference will be a reviewed collective monograph.

The deadline for abstract submissions is May 31, 2024. Please send a short abstract, the title of the paper, and a brief CV, to katrebova@upn.gov.sk, or rafal.latka@ipn.gov.pl or gergely.iso@neb.hu. The organizers reserve the right to select participants and will cover participants' accommodation expenses.