

# Institute of National Remembrance

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## Representatives of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience visited the IPN

Representatives of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience – Peter Rendek, Managing Director of the Platform, Andreja Valič Zver, Platform board member and SCNR Director, and Elise Pia, student at the University of Grenoble, visited the Institute of National Remembrance on 22 – 23 May.









































A press conference, referring to the Polish edition of the book *Lest We Forget. Memory of Totalitarianism in Europe* was held on 23 May. The book is an illustrated collection of **30 remarkable life stories of people affected by totalitarianism from 16 European countries**, containing photographs and documents. The purpose of the publication is to educate today`s young generation about Europe`s tragic totalitarian past and about the importance of upholding fundamental human rights, freedoms and democratic values in society.

As the Deputy President of the Institute of National Remembrance, Dr Mateusz Szpytma, pointed out in his speech, in many cases both



systems, Nazism and communism, had left their mark on these biographies. Such an example is the life of Captain Witold Pilecki, a Polish officer, "volunteer to Auschwitz", who penetrated this German camp in order to gather information about the scale of cruelty and organize resistance there. After the Second World War, he was sentenced to death by the Stalinist authorities. President Szpytma emphasized that the jointly published reader is just one of the initiatives undertaken with the Platform's authorities. He mentioned the investigation initiated thanks to the notification by the Platform, which had been underway for almost two years. It is run by the prosecutorial division of the IPN branch in Krakow and concerns thirty murders of Polish citizens on the Czechoslovak-Austrian border during the Cold War. A current project is also "European Gulag" aimed at presenting the phenomenon of "local gulags" in European countries in the form of a traveling exhibition (it would also have its own internet version). He initially declared the participation of the Institute's experts in this endeavour. He criticized European projects, such as the exhibition at the House of History in Brussels. On the initiative of the Platform and with the participation of IPN specialists, a detailed report was prepared, which captures the deficiencies of this exhibition.

Director Peter Rendek thanked the Institute's authorities for the invitation. He also presented the Italian version of the textbook, which was created simultaneously with the Polish one. He emphasized that the Institute remains an important partner for the Platform when it comes to joint projects, including the current one, aimed at including the experience of labour camps into the common memory of the

European continent. Joining the thanks, Andreja Valič Zver called the IPN a pillar of the Platform's international structure. She emphasized the importance of projects regarding the communist regime, aimed at sensitizing the West of Europe to the difficult conditions and painful past of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The key to better understanding between Eastern and Western societies is education, also by presenting personal stories of victims, collected in the abovementioned handbook addressed to young people. At the end of her speech, she quoted the words of Bronisław Geremek: "If Europe does not have a common memory, it will have nothing".

Dr Mateusz Marek from the IPN's National Education Office talked about the educational workshops planned after the press conference with the participation of young people - high school students from the General Anders sports championship school in Warsaw. They were devoted to the game "Across the Iron Curtain", co-created by the IPN and showing the fate of people who managed to escape through the Iron Curtain, and the aforementioned publication.

During the workshop, the youth played the game, and then, under the guidance of educators from the IPN's Branch Education Office in Warsaw, Andrzej Kryński and Ewa Dyngosz, they took part in workshops on the subject of the publication *Lest We Forget*. A short introduction about totalitarian countries was heard, and then each student had to read one of the biographies in the book and prepare a poster on the subject of common features of totalitarian regimes. The last part of the workshop was discussing the posters by their authors,



followed by a brief summary.

On May 22, talks about the current investigation were held at the President Szpytma's office. President Wojciech Paradyjak, presented its current course and planned further activities in this area. Also discussed was the issue of the exhibition on gulags along with the "map of memory", where the former locations of these places would be marked. The representatives of the Platform would like it to be presented, among others, in the European Parliament. Deputy Director of the Archive, dr Mariusz Żuławnik, confirmed the Archive's readiness to be involved in this project. The representative of the National Education Office Dr Paweł Błażewicz pointed out that a good starting point for the planned exhibition would be two existing exhibitions: on the Solovetsky Islands with photos by the Director of the IPN's National Education Office, Dr Adam Hlebowicz, and the second - obtained by the Institute thanks to the Russian association "Memorial". The representatives of the Platform also mentioned the idea of creating an exhibition on the martyrs of communism. President Mateusz Szpytma assured that the Institute would be happy to take part in this project as well. He offered a contribution in the form of one of the latest exhibitions created by the IPN, about Polish and Hungarian martyrs.

The representatives of the Platform also took part in the screening of the IPN production entitled "Passports to Paraguay", directed by Robert Kaczmarek, talking about the Bernese Group, composed of Polish diplomats and activists from Jewish organizations who worked together to obtain passports of South American states for Jewish people

imprisoned in ghettos by the German occupiers of Poland and other European countries. Thanks to these papers, many Jews avoided deportation to German death camps. The families of many survivors only today find out to whom they actually owe their lives.

The **Platform of European Memory and Conscience** is a non-profit international non-governmental organization founded according to the Civil Code of the Czech Republic. Established on 14 October 2011 in Prague by 20 founding Members from 12 EU Member States. The Institute of National Remembrance and the Warsaw Uprising Museum were the founding members on behalf of Poland. The Platform currently brings together 62 public and private institutions and organisations from 20 countries – 14 EU Member States (Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, France), Ukraine, Moldova, Iceland, Albania, Canada and the United States of America, active in research, documentation, awareness raising and education about the totalitarian regimes which befell Europe in the 20th century.

The establishment of the **Platform of European Memory and Conscience** was endorsed by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

Through its Members, the **Platform of European Memory and Conscience** represents at least 200,000 European citizens and over 1,100,000 North American citizens with European roots.

Every year, the Platform awards a prize to a person or persons fighting



today against totalitarianism, for the ideals of democracy, fundamental human rights and freedoms and the rule of law. The award of the Platform of European Remembrance and Conscience for 2018 was granted to **Oleh Sentsov**, in recognition of his personal courage, struggle and dedication to the observance of basic democratic values and freedom after his show trial in the Russian Federation.

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