

Institute of National Remembrance

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Exhibition „The Prague Spring. Intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968” in Opole

On August 8th, 2003, at 13.00 in the State Archives in Opole an opening of the exhibition “The Prague Spring. Intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968” will take place. The exhibition has been prepared by the Branch Public Education Office in Wroclaw. The exhibition will be held in Opole by the end of August.

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The process of political, social and economic changes initiated in Czechoslovakia in January 1968 and known as the “Prague Spring” quite quickly caused an uneasiness of the Soviet Union and other states of the communist block.

The intervention in Czechoslovakia by the armies of five states of the Warsaw Pact (Bulgaria, DDR, Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union) began on August 20th, 1968. After 10 o'clock p.m. planes with Soviet commando troops began to land at the Prague airport. Already at

night, government buildings started to be occupied. The leaders of the Prague Spring, including Alexander Dubcek, were arrested and then transported to Moscow. Upon learning about it, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party issued an act condemning the invasion and asking the citizens to remain undisturbed. President Svoboda appealed to the Czechoslovak Army not to resist the invaders.

The Czechoslovak borders were trespassed by 250 thousand Bulgarian, Polish, Soviet and Hungarian troops equipped in 4.200 tanks. The DDR army stopped at the border in fear of international repercussions. The Polish Army units which invaded used near 25 thousand troops, 647 tanks and 566 heavy lift transporters. To excuse the intervention a wide propaganda campaign was launched in Poland. Despite the resistance of civilians which appeared in some places (there were some street fights) in several hours the target positions in Prague were taken over. The liquidation of the achievements of the Prague Spring became a fact.

The intervention was a breach of the sovereignty of the state which aspired to reform the socio-political system according to the will of its people without participation of the Soviet Union. The Soviet leaders did not allow for the reform of the political system imposed on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which could be seen not only in the case of the military action in Czechoslovakia but also an earlier suppression of the uprising in DDR in 1953 or of the Hungarian revolution in 1956.

The exhibition presents a rich collection of photographs and documents, often presented for the first time, from the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance, “Karta” Centre, State Archives, New Acts Archives, Ossolineum and private collections.

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