

# Institute of National Remembrance

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



























## **A meeting at the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation**

On Monday, 12 June, the Platform representatives held a meeting at the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation with the participation of representatives of the IPN and the Polish Ministry of Justice. The following persons attended the meeting: Dr Neela Winkelmann, Managing Director of the Platform, Dr Lubomir Morbacher, lawyer and historian, former researcher at the Slovak IPN, Miroslav Lehký, former police investigator at the Office for documentation and investigation of communist crimes, and former deputy director of the Czech ÚSTR, Juliette Raymond-Tiedrez, 3rd year international law student from the University of Lille, France, Peter Rendek, co-author of “Across the Iron Curtain”, project manager, IT and graphics specialist, Dr Nika Bruskina, University of Vilnius, Krzysztof Masło, Director of the Department for International Cooperation and Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice, Paweł Jaros, Head of the Department for International Human Rights Procedures, Paweł Kaczor, Judge, Andrzej Pozorski, Director of the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation and Deputy Public Prosecutor, Dorota Cebrat, Head of the Department of Supervision over Investigations, Bogusław Tomasz Czerwiński,

Prosecutor of the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation and Agnieszka Jędrzak, Head of the Division of International Relations at the IPN's President's Office.

One of the main topics of the meeting was the ongoing investigation, conducted by Prosecutor Wojciech Pardyak from the Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Kraków and supervised by Prosecutor Bogusław Tomasz Czerwiński from the Commission in Warsaw. It is related to the killings of 13 Polish citizens who died on the Czechoslovak electrified Iron Curtain, trying to cross the border with Austria, in the years 1961-1965. The investigation was initiated based on a notification from the Platform. The Platform also supplied the necessary documents. The main surviving person to be held responsible is the former Minister of Interior and later Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia Lubomir Strougal. During the Monday meeting Dr Neela Winkelmann handed over additional documents related to the ongoing investigation. A press conference pertaining to the investigation into the killings of Polish citizens was held at the Janusz Kurtyka Educational Centre of the IPN and attracted a considerable number of journalists.

Talks were also held on the possible exhumation of the remains of the victims, with Platform researchers providing the necessary information. Both the Director of the Chief Commission and Deputy Public Prosecutor Andrzej Pozorski and Deputy President of the IPN Prof. Krzysztof Szwagrzyk expressed their readiness to participate in this project.



## **The world premiere of “Across the Iron Curtain”**

The presentation of "Across the Iron Curtain", a very unusual educational game about people who successfully managed to escape from the communist dictatorship and get into the free, democratic world, took place at the IPN's Educational Centre "History Point" during the second day of the meeting on Marszałkowska Street in Warsaw. The role of players is to help 30 refugees from 15 Eastern European countries attempting to go to the West. This game aims to present what escaping across the Iron Curtain really meant, and educate on what life looked like in the communist world. "Across the Iron Curtain" was created by an international team of specialists from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland – representatives of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience and provides valuable information on what mechanisms governed communist reality. The event began with welcoming speeches by representatives of the IPN and the Platform. The employees of the National Education Office delivered an interactive presentation on the reality of the communist regime and escapes across the Iron Curtain based on the iconography of an album "Persons fleeing the People's Republic of Poland" and the game "Across the Iron Curtain." Neela Winkelmann described the idea and origins of the game whereas its rules were presented by Łukasz Pogoda. The theory was immediately put into practice as the students started playing the game in groups of four. The guests also had the opportunity to explore the “History Point “, conduct interviews with the creators of "Across the Iron Curtain" and observe game demonstrations.

## **A meeting of the presidents of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience - Göran Lindblad and the Institute of National Remembrance - Dr Jarosław Szarek and their associates**

The 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017 , the last day of the 3 - day visit of the representatives of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience in Warsaw, started with an official meeting of the Presidents of both institutions, Mr Göran Lindblad and Dr Jarosław Szarek along with their associates: Dr Neela Winkelmann, the Managing Director of the Platform, Miroslav Lehký , Juliette Raymond-Tiedrez, Peter Rendek, Dr hab. Mirosław Szumiło, Director of the Historical Research Office, Dr Paweł Ukielski, Deputy Director of the Warsaw Rising Museum and Agnieszka Jędrzak, Head of the Division of International Relations. The participants of the discussion had the opportunity to summarise current mutual projects and plan future initiatives. Both the guests and the hosts regarded the visit as very fruitful.

The IPN's President also assured the authorities of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience that the Institute will do its utmost best not only to support vital initiatives undertaken by the Platform but also offer its help, share knowledge and experience. He highlighted the fact that the full scope of the communist regime is sometimes not fully comprehensible to the modern day inhabitants of Western Europe and that it is not only a statutory task of the IPN and the Platform, but also a moral obligation to familiarise people with the functioning of the



communist system. As Dr Neela Winkelmann pointed out “Today’s young generation does not know how hard it was to lead a normal life behind the impermeable Iron Curtain. The worst thing was not the lack of goods in the shops; it was the life in permanent fear, because all our human rights were being violated. Next, was the isolation from the free, democratic world. People longed to get out of the Communist dictatorship, to live dignified, free lives”. The participants of the meeting agreed that education is by far the most effective means of reaching that goal.

Moreover, the formation of new offices at the IPN – the Office of Search and Identification and the Office for Commemorating the Struggle and Martyrdom has further opened new areas where the two partners can develop their collaboration, share experiences and support each other. President Jarosław Szarek as well as Deputy President Prof. Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, who is also the Director of the Office of Search and Identification, both declared their willingness to offer help and to share their extensive knowledge and experience in the field of exhuming and identifying victims of totalitarian crimes from unmarked sites and mass graves for the purposes of conducting a dignified re-burial, with special emphasis on the exhumation of Polish victims of the communist regime in the former Czechoslovakia.

The participants were later hosted by the representatives of the Office of Commemorating the Struggle and Martyrdom, the educational division as well as the International Relations Division of the President's Office. Each of the units of the Institute prepared presentations and

informed the visitors about the technicalities of their daily work and tasks. The guests learnt about the characteristics of the IPN's resources, history and mission prepared by the International Relations Division.

The Platform representatives further listened to a presentation prepared by Dr Tomasz Ginter on the ongoing projects of the National Education Office, their new initiatives such as the opening of IPN's educational centres "History Point" abroad (Vilnius, Brussels, New York) as well as plans for the future projects.

Dr Damian Markowski representing the Office for Commemorating the Struggle and Martyrdom of the Polish Nation presented the scope of activities of the department and familiarised the visitors with the technicalities of their daily work and tasks. The guests expressed vivid interest in future cooperation with the Office.

### **A visit to lot "Ł" of the Warsaw Military Cemetery in Powązki**

The next part of the programme on the last day, was a visit to Warsaw's Military cemetery in Powązki, where on lot " Ł", the so called Łączka, the victims of totalitarian crimes were secretly buried by the communists in unmarked, often mass graves and consigned to oblivion. Prof. Krzysztof Szwaagrzyk, the Director of the Office of Search and Identification, personally showed the guests from the Platform the effects of the work of not only his team of employees, but also numerous volunteers offering their help in uncovering the truth about the past and redeeming those who were deprived of a dignified burial.



IPN's experts are now working in an area, which until recently, was inaccessible, because of existing tombs from the 80s, which have since been moved to another part of the cemetery. The IPN is still searching for the remains of about 100 former inmates of the Mokotów prison, probably buried secretly in Powązki. Among them are: Rittmeister Witold Pilecki, Gen. August Emil Fieldorf "Nil" and Col. Łukasz Ciepliński "Pług". "It's not just a question of scientific research, it's a matter of utmost state importance" said Prof. Szwagrzyk, when speaking of the search for great Polish heroes of the 20th century. The representatives of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience had the opportunity of seeing newly discovered mass graves, the process of sieving the soil in search of even the smallest parts of human bones and the ways of securing and documenting the findings. Dr Neela Winkelmann described the visit to lot "Ł" as exceptionally moving.

### **A tour of the former prison on Rakowiecka Street which will be transformed into the Museum of Accursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the People's Republic of Poland**

The visitors from the Platform also had a chance to visit the former prison on Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw. This is the place where the Museum of Accursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the People's Republic of Poland is being set up in place of the former Detention Center, where in 1953, among others Gen. August Emil Fieldorf "Nil" was killed. The museum is going to be opened in march 2019 and will serve both educational and publishing functions informing the public

about Polish history from the second world war until 1989. Apart from a general overview of those times, the biographies of individual soldiers and the stories of their families, the museum will also present the profiles of their perpetrators. Our guests were shown around the future museum by captain Andrzej Rytka, who emphasised the fact that from the mid-40s and in the 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century members of the underground anticommunist movement and later political prisoners of the Polish People's Republic were tortured and murdered there.

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