

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The functioning of memory institutes, such as the Institute of National Remembrance, can be seen in many contexts. They have their importance from a legal and moral point of view. They are of great importance for the future. However, with accordance to our main topic of today's debate, I will focus on the importance of the Institute of National Remembrance in the Polish public life.

The issue of coming to terms with the Communist past returned in the Polish public debate many times in the 1990s. Attempts have been made to introduce decommunization, lustration, punishing perpetrators, establishing compensation for the victims and honoring the memory of the murdered. Most of these measures failed. Decommunisation Act was not passed, an attempt to carry out lustration in 1992 led to the fall of the previous government. Throughout the decade, only 28 perpetrators were convicted. One of the processes started at that time, regarding the perpetrators of the massacre in December 1970, has not ended to this day. Already in 1991 a law was passed which invalidated many wrongful convictions, and allowed for the opportunity to obtain compensation. However, it did not cover all categories of the oppressed, and only in 2010 the Minister of Justice began to exercise on a large scale his right to apply annulment of judgments of those who were dead and did not have relatives who could apply to the court on their behalf. Even a relatively widespread campaign of changing street names associated with the Communist regime, was not a complete success. To this day, there remain hundreds of streets, whose patrons are Communists or Communist organizations. Despite the involvement of many historians, especially of the younger generation, the knowledge of the Communist era remained very incomplete. It was also associated with difficulty in accessing the archives, mainly of the former security apparatus, but also in many cases, it was impossible to access the files of the Communist Party.

The desire to change this state of affairs prompted the initiative, which in December 1998, resulted in establishing by the Polish parliament the Institute of National Remembrance - Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation. The act was vetoed by the post-communist president of that time - Aleksander Kwaśniewski. However, the veto was rejected. In this way, a unique institution was established, which is responsible for variety of function: prosecution of crimes of the past, collecting and making available archival materials, conducting research and delivering broadly understood education. The competence of the Institute includes not only the period of the Communist dictatorship, but also the time of World War II. The actual functioning of the Institute began in June 2000, after the election by the parliament of the Institute's first president.

In 2007 there was a significant extension of the IPN's competence. Since then the Institute is also responsible for lustration (before there was a separate institution).

Law makers were aware that the Institute of National Remembrance will handle difficult and often painful matters of the past. For this reason, the Institute has been provided with great independence from the current politics.

It was widely expected that these difficult matters would primarily concern secret collaborators of the Communist security services. Meanwhile, the first major challenge, which the Institute had to face, was associated with the period of the World War II. In 2001, the attention of the public in Poland was caught by the case of the massacre of Jews in Jedwabne and participation of the local Poles in it. Although the Institute was only in the phase of organization, it was possible to investigate the case also from the side of academic research and prosecution. Owing to the Jedwabne case, the Institute of National Remembrance has earned reputation of the institution, which can to handle difficult problems of the past in a professional manner. This opinion has strengthened in the coming years.

The Institute of National Remembrance responds not only to the current challenges. In our work we also undertake long-term projects, which aim to change the social consciousness and revive to the general memory important persons and events previously sentenced to oblivion. Examples of such activities were being undertaken in the first years of the Institute and concerned the underground war for independence, whose members are referred to as "cursed soldiers". Even ten years ago the subject was widely unknown. In the libraries there almost only could be found propaganda publications from the period of Communism, describing them as "bandits" and "fascists". The Institute has undertaken a number of investigations related to repressing them, focusing especially on the so-called "judicial murders". However, research and education proved to be the most important. Its culmination was released in early 2007 in the form of a monumental "Atlas of the Independence Underground in Poland", which presented a huge range of activity of the underground organizations in the years 1944-1956. It was accompanied by dozens of other books, exhibitions and documentary films. They have made a breakthrough in the state of consciousness of the society. Today, the matter is commonly known and lively discussed. In 2011, an official national holiday was established, the Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers. In a few days it will be celebrated for the third time. The celebrations are not only prepared by the Institute of National Remembrance. There are hundreds of events of different rank across the whole country. They are

attended by the president of Poland, state and local authorities, and most importantly many community organizations and informal groups such as football fans.

In the conducted research the Institute seeks to use its full potential. Across the country we employ approximately 150 historians (the number excludes educators). This enables implementation of large-scale projects, which thoroughly change the current state of knowledge. A particularly important research topic in recent years, was the history of the Polish opposition in the 1970s and 1980. Among the many important publications in this field I would like to mention two. The first is the synthesis of the "Solidarity" history, released in 2010. It consists of six comprehensive volumes, each of which contains approximately thousand pages. For the first time the union's activity in all regions of the country has been described. This work is complemented by the Encyclopedia of Solidarity, which presents biographies of thousands of activists and holds entries describing several thousand opposition structures, especially from the period of martial law.

Since 2011, the Institute of National Remembrance has a new right - we can approach the president to honor the anti-communist opposition activists with the Cross of Freedom and Solidarity. This enables honoring people of merit, whose story we tell in our publications. We cannot forget about other needs. A few weeks ago with a group of foundations and associations we have inaugurated a public campaign entitled "Thank you for freedom". It aims to organize support for the anti-communist resistance heroes who are now in a difficult situation.

Educational work of the Institute of National Remembrance has the widest public range. We use many forms of education, both rather traditional but also modern. Among the first I can mention exhibitions, which to date we have more than 350. Each of them is shown repeatedly, some also abroad. Among modern forms of education there are educational websites, which we have created more than 20. The most popular of them have reached several million visits.

Educational activities are not restricted to martyrology, although cases related to repression and resistance naturally dominate. One of the biggest success stories of the recent years is the board game called "Queue", which shows functioning of the economy in the Communist Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. We have already printed more than 50,000 copies, but it still does not meet the requirements. It is the most popular board game in Poland of the recent years. Its success reverberated not only at home but throughout the world.

The educational work is undoubtedly the best valued sphere of the Institute of National Remembrance. It is praised even by the Institute's opponents. On the other end, there is prosecution, which is most criticized, also by many IPN's supporters. Certainly, there were higher expectations from the performance of the prosecutors. However, one should remember the difficulties associated with conducting investigations into crimes that took place many years ago.

Also, it is also worth noting that the results are much better than in the 1990s. So far 460 people have been charged with committing Communist crimes, of whom more than 150 were sentenced.

The investigation, which attracted considerable public interest was the investigation of the perpetrators of introducing the martial law, including General Wojciech Jaruzelski. In 1990s an attempt was made to punish the generals for the coup held in December 1981. However, the petition to bring them before the State Tribunal was rejected by the parliament at the time when the majority was held by the post-communist party. In this situation, the only possibility left was to bring them to trial in an ordinary criminal case. The Institute of National Remembrance returned to the case and the generals were accused of participating in an organized criminal group of military nature. Such wording in the indictment met with criticism of part of the media and, understandably, of the post-communist camp politicians. Last year the first judgment was delivered and General Czesław Kiszczak was sentenced. The case of two other persons was dismissed due to amnesty. The judgment of the court confirmed correctness of the indictment. Despite the success, at the same time the case is a symbol of failure of the Institute. In spite of numerous publications on the subject, close to half of Poles still believe that the imposition of martial law was a "lesser evil" and prevented Soviet intervention.

In the course of investigations and scientific research extensive knowledge has been accumulated about places in which crimes were committed in the 1940s and 1950s. Most of these places have been forgotten over the years, some ceased to exist and the majority changed their function. A few years ago the Institute started work to document them. In the course of the project, data on more than 550 prisons, labor camps, premises of security offices and military information has been collected. 210 of them have been described in a large album, which was released two months ago. We hope that through this action, the places will be noticed in the local memory. We wish that at least a few of them will become museums of victims of Communism, especially because there have been discovered places still holding inscriptions carved with the hands of prisoners.

In the last year the most attention of the media and the public was caught by the search for burial sites of the victims of the Communist terror, which is conducted by the Institute of National Remembrance, in cooperation with other institutions. This interest is related to the fact that among the thousands of people whose place of burial is unknown there are heroes such as Gen. Emil Fieldorf, Chief Commander of the Home Army and Captain Witold Pilecki, the volunteer to Auschwitz. The found remains are identified through genetic testing. The most important place of work now are mass graves discovered last year in Warsaw. The case was described hundreds of times by all newspapers, television channels and radio stations in Poland. Very moving are the situations when

the families, children and siblings of the murdered, learn about finding of the remains of their loved ones.

Cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the media is of great importance to the work of the Institute of National Remembrance. Among the numerous joint projects I will mention one. For several years, the Institute acquainted writers and directors with the most interesting stories recorded in documents from our archives. On that basis plays were written and presented by the Polish Television in the so-called "Stage of Fact". Some of those gathered 3 million viewers in front of television sets.

It is impossible to present all the spheres of activity of the Institute of National Remembrance in such short time. I was not able to mention the archives of the Institute, which hold more than 90 kilometers of files. It plays a great role, although the demand for access to documents is much smaller than at our German colleagues'. I mentioned only a few of more than a thousand books published throughout twelve years. I said nothing about the role that the Institute plays in building local identity in various regions of Poland. I cannot add anything about the role that work of the Institute plays in the building reconciliation and understanding between Poles and other nations.

There is no doubt that the Institute of National Remembrance has an important place in the Polish public life. It is indicated not only by the media interest in our work. Despite many attacks from some circles and spreading lies about the work of the Institute, the level of public trust is maintained at a consistently high level around 45%, while 20% declares lack of trust. This is one of the best results among state institutions, much better than the ratios of government or parliament. In my view, the position reached by the Institute is due to several factors:

- independence from the world of politics is ensured
- combining many forms of work in one institution: at the same time the Institute is an archive, a prosecution office, a center of academic research and education; specialists in different fields can work together
- employing at the Institute highly skilled specialist, mostly young people, whose enthusiasm allows for conducting more and more new projects.

The Institute of National Remembrance performs duties of the Polish state regarding the victims of totalitarian regimes and their families. We seek that the perpetrators of crimes are met with justice and the distorted for years history of resistance is described truly. Our work is also of great importance for the future. By learning about the difficult past, we indicated values to help shaping the society's attitude. Much has been already done, however much work still remains ahead of us.