

News from Prague

Zprávy z Prahy



A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR

30 years since the founding of the Terezín Initiative Institute

If we recall today the very beginnings of the ITI, we have to go back more than thirty years. Still in the euphoria after November 1989, we were all guided by the motto that "nothing is impossible". Many dreams and visions that were unthinkable under communism were suddenly becoming reality. This was also true for those who had hoped all along that they would be able to bear personal witness to the immense injustices and sufferings they had been subjected to during the Nazi persecution, which were impossible to talk about in public under Communism. At that time, former prisoners of Terezín founded their own association, which they named the Terezín Initiative. Their vision was not only to commemorate the previously silenced history, but also to carry out systematic research and publish books. The most important one was that which would provide documentation of all the Jewish victims of the Terezín concentration camp. Miroslav Kárný and his wife Margita undertook such a formidable task even before the fall of communism, and their painstaking work - in the beginning, it was mostly handwritten lists and typescripts - served as the main basis for the groundbreaking work, the Terezín Memorial Book. It is no coincidence that not only Václav Havel, still as Czechoslovak president, but also his counterparts on the German side, Richard von Weizsäcker and Roman Herzog, were at its birth. Thanks to them and a financial contribution from the Federal Republic, the prized work was published. It was not until much later, when it was technically possible, that a digital form of the work was created, which we now call the Victims' Database.

These were the very beginnings, when it was clear that for such a demanding task an institution had to be established to continue the work that had been started. This is how the Terezín Initiative Foundation was founded thirty years ago, in December 1993, and five years later it was transformed into our present Institute. What has been achieved in these three decades and who all contributed to our successes will be discussed next. For now - in December 2023 - it is enough to at least remind ourselves that our Institute has much to celebrate.

I wish you a Happy Hanukkah and a Merry Christmas!

- Director JUDr. Tomáš Kraus

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Changes at the ITI

At the beginning of August we were sad that our wonderful Eliska and Austrian volunteer Sebastian will no longer be working at ITI. But we are happy that they are both starting a new chapter in their lives. We thank them both for their work and all the wonderful moments we had with them.

We are happy to welcome our new Austrian volunteer Lena from Gedenkdienst to ITI. We wish her many interesting moments during her stay in Prague.

Our new colleague Dorota has been supporting us in the office since the beginning of December. She is responsible for PR and production. We wish her all the best for the beginning of her time with us and we are glad she is with us.



CONFERENCE AND SEMINAR “HOLOCAUST A MY” IN PRAGUE



At the end of September we organized a seminar for teachers on the topic of the “Holocaust and us. Traces of history in public space”.

The pedagogical part of the seminar was led by Dana Gabařová and Roman Ferstl. During the seminar, participants had the opportunity to explore different groups of Holocaust victims in discussions and lectures and to discuss how the memory of the Holocaust can be used in teaching.

Lukáš Lev and Tomáš Kraus gave a tour of the Great and Small Fortress of Terezín, talking for example about life in the attic or the transports to the East. Among others, we visited the Ghetto Museum, the Magdeburg Barracks, the cemetery and the crematorium.

We presented our MemoMAP exhibition on the history of the Holocaust in Prague and took a guided tour of Prague using the MemoGIS app and learned about the latest stories from the Mladá Boleslav archives.

At the end of May, we held a conference on "The Holocaust and Us. Different Narratives of the Holocaust in Memory and Teaching".

The panel discussion gave participants an insight into the different ways in which the Holocaust is dealt with in teaching in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany and Poland.

The experience of the descendants of survivors - Tomáš Kraus and Jana Kokyová - provided a different perspective. They talked about how they coped with the Holocaust in their families and how they perceive the Holocaust narrative in today's society.

We presented the travelling exhibition MemoMAP - the history of the Holocaust in Prague and the related app MemoGIS, where you can find how the Nazi laws manifested themselves in public space. During the workshops, participants worked with memories of survivors using films, photographs and dramatization.

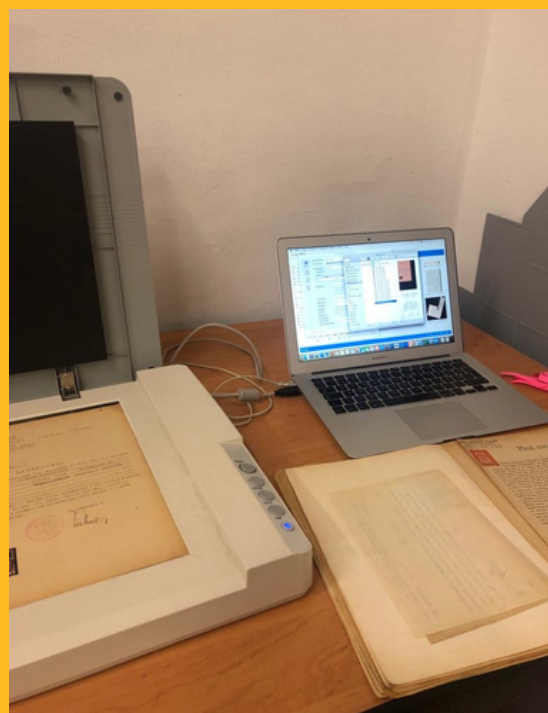


HUMAN FATES IN THE SHADOW OF THE HOLOCAUST - MLADÁ BOLESLAV

Following the first meeting held at the State District Archive Mladá Boleslav, in January 2023, we started preparatory work on the digitisation of archival materials. This marks almost exactly the 80th anniversary of the Mladá Boleslav transports CI and Cm. These happened on January 13th and January 16th, 1943.

In February, we handed over a list of people transported from Mladá Boleslav and the surrounding area. Based on this, we gradually prepared the archival materials from selected archival funds in the archive, so that digitisation work could begin in June. The funds in question are mainly the District Offices of the towns of Mladá Boleslav, Mnichovo Hradiště and Benátky nad Jizerou. These contain the passport application files. Other funds digitized are the funds of the District Courts in Mladá Boleslav and Mnichovo Hradiště, which dealt with the declaration of death agenda.

Our volunteers, first Sebastian Halbauer, now Lena Lasinger are responsible for the actual digitization. Thanks to their meticulous work, we had digitized the archival records of more than three hundred people by the end of this year. We have managed to "return the face" to twenty-six of them, thanks to the photographs preserved in the archive collections.



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

This year was very rich in terms of international cooperation: we renewed our cooperation with the Anne Frank Youth Network, concluded a new cooperation agreement with the University of New York in Prague and joined the European Practitioners Network against Antisemitism.

Anne Frank Youth Network in Amsterdam

During the introductory seminar "Training of Trainers", which took place on 3 and 4 November in Prague, our colleagues from Amsterdam provided us with information about the Anne Frank Youth Network (AFYN), its motivation, its objectives and the different aspects of the network. The main theme is the life of Anne Frank - her diary, her fate and her legacy - which we focused on especially on the first day. On the second day of the seminar we learned about activities and methods that we can use in future projects and workshops. These activities deal with the themes of discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism and democracy. They form the basis for our practical work.

At a time like this, it is more important than ever to talk to people, inform them and educate them in order to prevent marginalisation, prejudice and hatred. So that we can live together in peace.

We would like to thank everyone who made such a great and exciting seminar possible - the organisers, the trainers and most importantly the participants.

We look forward to working with you and to future projects!





Workshop MemoMap

At the end of November, we teamed up with students from New York University in Prague through Verto Education to organize a workshop on how the anti-Jewish laws during the Nazi occupation affected Jewish life in Prague.

We then introduced the MemoMAP app and used it to tour Vinohrady. Students used the web app to read about some of the incidents that occurred because of these laws.

Finally, we had the opportunity to talk to Tomas Kraus, the director of the ITI, about his life, his parents' experiences; and his assessment of the current situation.

European Practitioners Network against Antisemitism

In December, we joined EPNA's Berlin workshop, "Hands-On Against Antisemitism" Strategies in Countering Antisemitism in Times of Polycrisis. In a group of various professional backgrounds, we discussed the escalating antisemitism following the recent Israel-Palestine conflict, the differences between antisemitism and antizionism, how the war impacts current moods and alignments, especially among youth, and the increased threat of violence towards Jewish people. Another topic addressed was women in conflict, misogyny in politics, and how the narrative is impacted through being reported on predominantly by white male reporters.



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Information about donations

Approximately 80% of our funding comes from grant programs; it is very difficult to find funds for the day-to-day operation of the Victims Database, the holocaust.cz portal, or the library. **We are grateful for any contribution!**

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