

Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism

June 3rd, 2008, Prague, Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic

- Bearing in mind the dignified and democratic future of our European home,
- whereas societies that neglect the past have no future,
- whereas Europe will not be united unless it is able to reunite its history, recognize Communism and Nazism as a common legacy and bring about an honest and thorough debate on all the totalitarian crimes of the past century,
- whereas the Communist ideology is directly responsible for crimes against humanity,
- whereas a bad conscience stemming from the Communist past is a heavy burden for the future of Europe and for our children,
- whereas different valuations of the Communist past may still split Europe into “West” and “East”,
- whereas European integration was a direct response to wars and violence provoked by totalitarian systems on the continent,
- whereas consciousness of the crimes against humanity committed by the Communist regimes throughout the continent must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regimes crimes did,
- whereas there are substantial similarities between Nazism and Communism in terms of their horrific and appalling character and their crimes against humanity,
- whereas the crimes of Communism still need to be assessed and judged from the legal, moral and political as well as the historical point of view,
- whereas the crimes were justified in the name of the class struggle theory and the principle of dictatorship of the „proletariat“ using terror as a method to preserve the dictatorship,
- whereas Communist ideology has been used as a tool in the hands of empire builders in Europe and in Asia to reach their expansionist goals,
- whereas many of the perpetrators committing crimes in the name of Communism have not yet been brought to justice and their victims have not yet been compensated,

- whereas providing objective comprehensive information about the Communist totalitarian past leading to a deeper understanding and discussion is a necessary condition for sound future integration of all European nations,
- whereas the ultimate reconciliation of all European peoples is not possible without a concentrated and in depth effort to establish the truth and to restore the memory,
- whereas the Communist past of Europe must be dealt with thoroughly both in the academy and among the general public, and future generations should have ready access to information on Communism,
- whereas in different parts of the globe only a few totalitarian Communist regimes survive but, nevertheless, they control about one fifth of the world's population, and by still clinging to power they commit crimes and impose a high cost to the well-being of their people,
- whereas in many countries, even though Communist parties are not in power, they have not distanced themselves publicly from the crimes of Communist regimes nor condemned them,
- whereas Prague is one of the places that lived through the rule of both Nazism and Communism,
- believing that millions of victims of Communism and their families are entitled to enjoy justice, sympathy, understanding and recognition for their sufferings in the same way as the victims of Nazism have been morally and politically recognized,

we, participants of the Prague Conference “European Conscience and Communism“,

- having regard to the European Parliament resolution on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe on 8 May 1945 of May 12th, 2005,
- having regard to Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of January 26th, 2006,
- having regard to the EPP XVIth Congress resolution of February 5th, 2004, calling for the creation of an independent expert body for the collection and assessment of information about violations of human rights under totalitarian Communism and urging the creation of a memorial museum of the victims of Communism,
- having regard to the resolutions on Communist crimes adopted by a number of national parliaments,

- having regard to the experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa,
- having regard to the experience of Institutes of Memory and memorials in Poland, Germany, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the United States and the museums of occupation in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia,
- having regard to present and upcoming presidencies in the EU and the Council of Europe
- having regard to the fact that 2009 is the 20th anniversary of the collapse of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe as well as the massacre in Tiananmen Square in Beijing,

call for:

1. reaching an all-European understanding that both the Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes each to be judged by their own terrible merits to be destructive in their policies of systematically applying extreme forms of terror, suppressing all civic and human liberties, starting aggressive wars and, as an inseparable part of their ideologies, exterminating and deporting whole nations and groups of population; and that as such they should be considered to be the main disasters, which blighted the 20th century,
2. recognition that many crimes committed in the name of Communism should be assessed as crimes against humanity serving as a warning for future generations, in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal,
3. formulation of a common approach regarding crimes of totalitarian regimes, inter alia Communist regimes, and raising a Europe-wide awareness of the Communist crimes in order to clearly define a common attitude towards the crimes of the Communist regimes,
4. introduction of legislation that would enable courts of law to judge and sentence perpetrators of Communist crimes and to compensate victims of Communism,
5. ensuring the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all the totalitarian regimes,

6. European and international pressure for effective condemnation of the past Communist crimes and for efficient fight against ongoing Communist crimes,
7. recognition of Communism as an integral and horrific part of Europe's common history
8. acceptance of pan-European responsibility for crimes committed by Communism,
9. establishment of 23rd August, the day of signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, as a day of remembrance of the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27th,
10. responsible attitudes of National Parliaments as regards acknowledgement of Communist crimes as crimes against humanity, leading to the appropriate legislation, and to the parliamentary monitoring of such legislation,
11. effective public debate about the commercial and political misuse of Communist symbols,
12. continuation of the European Commission hearings regarding victims of totalitarian regimes, with a view to the compilation of a Commission communication,
13. establishment in European states, which had been ruled by totalitarian Communist regimes, of committees composed of independent experts with the task of collecting and assessing information on violations of human rights under totalitarian Communist regime at national level with a view to collaborating closely with a Council of Europe committee of experts;
14. ensuring a clear international legal framework regarding a free and unrestricted access to the Archives containing the information on the crimes of Communism,
15. establishment of an Institute of European Memory and Conscience which would be both - A) a European research institute for totalitarianism studies, developing scientific and educational projects and providing support to networking of national research institutes specialising in the subject of totalitarian experience, B) and a pan-European museum/memorial of victims of all totalitarian regimes, with an aim to

memorialise victims of these regimes and raise awareness of the crimes committed by them,

16. organising of an international conference on the crimes committed by totalitarian Communist regimes with the participation of representatives of governments, parliamentarians, academics, experts and NGOs, with the results to be largely publicised world-wide,
17. adjustment and overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the Nazi crimes
18. the all-European extensive and thorough debate of Communist history and legacy,
19. joint commemoration of next year's 20th anniversaries of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the massacre in Tiananmen Square,

we, participants of the Prague Conference “European Conscience and Communism“, address all peoples of Europe, all European political institutions including national governments, parliaments, European Parliament, European Commission, Council of Europe and other relevant international bodies, and call on them to embrace the ideas and appeals stipulated in this Prague Declaration and to implement them in practical steps and policies.

Václav Havel, former dissident and President of Czechoslovakia / the Czech Republic
Joachim Gauck, former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi archives, Germany

Göran Lindblad, Vice-president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Member of Parliament, Sweden

Vytautas Landsbergis, Member of the European Parliament, former dissident and President of Lithuania

Jana Hybášková, Member of the European Parliament, Czech Republic

Christopher Beazley, Member of the European Parliament, Great Britain

Tunne Kelam, Member of the European Parliament, former dissident, Estonia

Jiří Liška, Senator, Vice-chairman of the Senate, Parliament of the Czech Republic

Martin Mejstřík, Senator, Parliament of the Czech Republic

Jaromír Štětina, Senator, Parliament of the Czech Republic

Emanuelis Zingeris, Member of Parliament, Lithuania, Chairman, International commission for the assessment of crimes of the Nazi and Soviet occupation regimes in Lithuania

Tseten Samdup Chhoekyapa, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geneva, Tibet

Ivanka Survilla, Exile President of Belorussia, Canada

Zianon Pazniak, Chairman of the People's National Front of Belorussia, Chairman of the Belorussian Conservative Christian Party, USA

Růžena Krásná, former political prisoner, politician, Czech Republic

Jiří Stránský, former political prisoner, writer, former PEN club chairman, Czech Republic

Václav Vaško, former political prisoner, diplomat, catholic activist, Czech Republic

Alexandr Podrabinek, former dissident and political prisoner, journalist, Russia

Pavel Žáček, Director, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Czech Republic

Miroslav Lehký, Vice-director, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Czech Republic

Łukasz Kamiński, Vice-director, Institute of National Remembrance, Poland

Michael Kißener, professor of history, Johann Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany

Eduard Stehlík, historian, Vice-director, Institute for Military History, Czech Republic

Karel Straka, historian, Institute for Military History, Czech Republic

Jan Urban, journalist, Czech Republic

Jaroslav Hutka, former dissident, songwriter, Czech Republic

Lukáš Pachta, political scientist and writer, Czech Republic