

# Prison Memorial in Uherské Hradiště

## Vision of Memoria Initiative

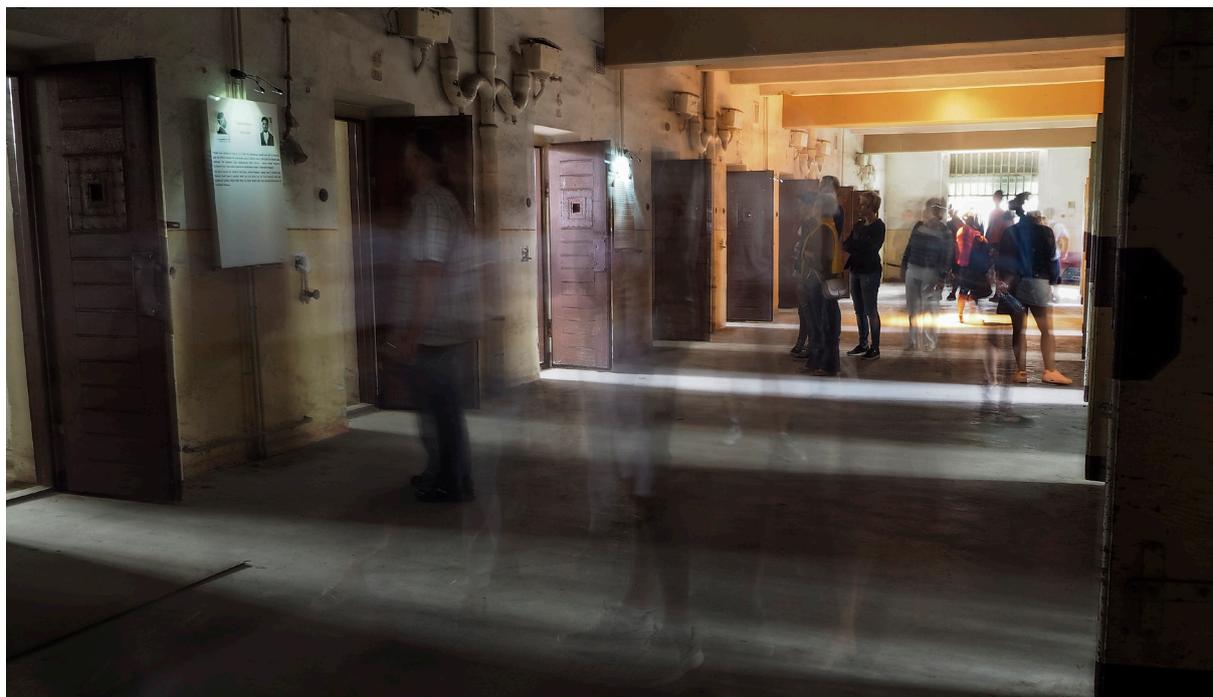
The former prison in Uherské Hradiště is a place with a grim past. During the German Protectorate large numbers of anti-Nazi fighters were jailed here, and later hundreds of dissidents to the Communist regime suffered outside the prison walls, with many of them exposed to inhuman torture or even executed in the prison courtyard.

We have a clear vision for how to use the area of the former prison. **We seek to turn this place of suffering and human arbitrariness, but also of bravery, into a space of incessant search for the firm foundations of justice and respect for the basic rights of every human.**

The way to accomplish this vision lies in **building and running a modern museum-memorial**, which includes an all-in-one piety, exhibition, education and science.

The key point of our plan is **seeking justice**. The museum-memorial should become a respectable carrier of the message that it is absolutely paramount to keep seeking and promoting humanity and justice, although an absolute justice seems to be an unattainable goal in today's world.

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We look for justice by shining a spotlight on **injustice directly associated with this particular prison**, by documenting and salvaging the memory of the place, by seeking the punishment of the living culprits and by carrying out remedies of their wrongdoings and damage caused to the victims and their families. Equally, we have to point at political persecution and violation of human and citizen rights **so typical of modern times**.

This Memorial should also **reveal the mechanisms leading to the abuse of power and help us to learn from the previous harrowing experience** so that society can identify possible threats and eliminate them before they impose themselves on us.

A substantial part of the grounds has not changed since the closure of the prison in 1960. The Prison Memorial in Uherské Hradiště is supposed **to affect its visitors' minds both as a unique genius loci and at the same time as a modern museum reflecting current trends in architecture and design**. We want this institution to be alive and open to evolution.

We believe that the Uherské Hradiště prison with its future Memorial represents **a significant historical sight whose importance goes beyond regional and national, one that also aspires to become an internationally recognized memorial to the victims of totalitarian regimes**. Similar memorials and museums can be found in Sighet, Tallin, Berlin, Cottbus and Bautzen, to name but a few, all of which also serve as examples and potential partner institutions.

The forwardness of every society reflects its connection to its own past. We believe that the preservation, development and operation of the museum-memorial are the responsibility of the state, local self-governments and public finances in general. The memorial must occupy a unique place in the structure of state-owned historical and scientific institutions.

## Important steps

In order to make the Uherské Hradiště Prison Memorial project succeed, we need to take the following steps:

- Reach an **agreement of key participants** on the realization of the Memorial
- Work out a **reasonable concept** of the Memorial resulting from discussions of respectable experienced Europe-based experts in related disciplines
- Come up with a **top-notch architectural design** of the Memorial to fit in with the urbanistic concept of the town, either as a result of an international competition or commissioned to a renowned architectural studio
- Collect **enough financial means to build** the Memorial
- Secure a provision for **a functional model** of the Memorial

## Current state

(as of the late 2020)

The petition connected with the rise of our initiative in 2010 opposed the state's endeavor to evade the responsibility for further development of the object, or lack thereof. Over 15,000 people have signed it so far. This civil pressure has helped to stop the government from auctioning the prison off or allowing it to let the entire building deteriorate as it continues to be ignored.

From 2015 to 2020, thanks to the Memoria initiative and a number of volunteers, a “provisional museum” was established in the prison building. Thousands of people have seen the interior, visited concerts, exhibitions and taken part in live art events. Also, every year an ecumenical service of reconciliation took place inside. These activities have helped significantly raise the awareness of the history of the prison in Uherské Hradiště beyond the boundaries of the region.

Heightened public interest spurred politicians to act. In 2016 a **memorandum about the future utility of the area** was drawn up between the State Representation Office for Property Matters, the Ministries of Finance, Culture and Justice, the District Court, the town of Uherské Hradiště and Zlín region. As a result, the entire area came under the administration of the SROP in 2017.

In 2018, a **feasibility study** recommended a reconstruction, whereby the object of the prison would include the Museum of Totalitarianism, the District Court, a Probation and Mediation Service and the District Prosecutor's Office. In 2020, groundwork was laid—the area was cleared while technology and construction scouting as well as other documentary studies got under way.

The **Moravian Regional Museum** was commissioned to work out a plan of activities for a new institution under the working title Museum of Totalitarianism. To this end it formed a work group whose members represent not only Slovácké Museum but also Memoria Initiative.

We would never have reached this stage in the process if it hadn't been for an enormous effort on the part of a large number of individual citizens. These included both anonymous citizens and politicians from various democratic parties as well as municipal officials from all levels of public administration.

*The Uherské Hradiště prison is  
a living proof that civil society and  
its supporters can make a difference.*

Members of Memoria Initiative, z.s.