

## Memory of the World International Register

### The collection of Czech and Slovak samizdat periodicals from the years 1948 to 1989 (Czech Republic)

2012-58

#### 1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The collection of unique Czech, Slovak or Czechoslovak samizdat periodicals from the years 1948 to 1989, which is stored in the public Library named LIBRI PROHIBITI, is the largest in the world. It is comprehensive and many of its items are unique, documenting how the struggle against the Communist totalitarian regime was carried out. Therefore, it is of substantial importance for the study of the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The collection also offers a precious testimony of the development of independent journalism and the independence of human thought—which is not submitted to political power—based on the thought of journalists as well as scientists. Therefore, it is of substantial importance in terms of ethics, science and the history of the journalistic profession.

The above-mentioned collection is being proposed for inscription on the Memory of the World Register because, in particular, it needs to be maintained and preserved for the future generations. Also, its inscription would certainly help better inform the national and international civil public on the importance of this unique collection, and would open up more opportunities for a stronger support to the LIBRI PROHIBITI Library in its efforts to ensure the protection and the presentation of the collection being nominated.

#### 2.0 Nominator

##### 2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

The Libri Prohibiti Society, Civic Association, with the agreement and the support of the Czech Ministry of Culture.

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##### 2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

The Libri Prohibiti Society, C. A., is the owner of the LIBRI PROHIBITI Library's holdings, including the collection being proposed for inscription. The society created this library.

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##### 2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Contact person for the nominator—Mr Jiří Gruntorád.

Contact person for the Library—Mrs Kateřina Volková.

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##### 2.4 Contact details

Name	Address
Mr Jiří Gruntorád	Libri prohibiti, C.A., Senovážné nám.2, 110 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic

Telephone  
00 420 224 225 971

Facsimile  
00 420 224 225 971

Email  
libpro@iol.cz

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### **3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage**

#### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

##### **The collection of Czech and Slovak samizdat periodicals from the years 1948 to 1989**

This collection of periodicals, including books, bulletins and circulars, was published at the time of the Communist regime, from 1948 to 1989—the collection being limited by the period of publication, it is now closed—on the territory of former Czechoslovakia, in Czech and Slovak. These periodical publications were published by individuals, informal groups, civic initiatives or informal associations from a few up to hundreds of units. They were copied using primitive techniques, e. g. copies typewritten with carbon paper, printing using duplicating machine, etc.

Thematically speaking, the collection is particularly diversified. It includes scientific periodicals, published by philosophers, historians, theologians, economists, sociologists and literary scientists who were not allowed to publish their works officially. Among the different topics were also literary, religious (of different denominations), artistic (plastic arts, theater, music) and regional sociocultural periodicals, books for youth (scouts, campers, etc.). Last, some monographs (e.g., monographs on musical genres, literary movements, etc.) can be found.

All these different kinds of periodical publications have one thing in common. These are documents created outside the official periodical publications and published despite censorship. They were not available in the current libraries since they were neither bought by the latter nor managed by the legal deposit system. Also, needless to say that they were not intended to be commonly sold to the public. Their ex-post collection is hard to carry out, especially because of a reduced number of copies and their sporadic preservation.

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#### **3.2 Catalogue or registration details**

The collection of samizdat periodicals of the LIBRI PROHIBITI Library consists of 423 Czech titles and 44 Slovak titles. In general, the books can be found in A4 format (21 x 29.7 cm, or 8.3 × 11.7 inches); some of them can be found in A5 format (21 x 14 cm, or 5.83 x 8.27) and a few ones have other formats that are less common.

An issue consists of one sheet of paper up to 750 pages (*Host—Host* n°4/1988). Some titles were only issued once and others were issued for more than ten years (e.g. *Informace o Chartě 77—Information on Charter 77* consists of more than 180 issues). The book *Historické studie—Historical Studies* only consists of 26 issues, which nonetheless, with 200 pages per issue on average, accounts for at least 5200 pages in total. Some titles of periodicals, such as *Ekologický bulletin—Ecological Bulletin*, *Ekonomická revue—Economic Revue*, *Filosofický sborník—Philosophical Proceedings*, *Informace o církvi—Information on the Church*, *Kritický sborník—Critical Proceedings*, *O divadle—About Theater*, *Sociologický obzor—Sociological Horizon*, *Střední Evropa—Central Europe*, *Teologické texty—Theological Texts*, reveal their content and their focus. The size of the collection is 30 linear meters. It is listed in two catalogs (Czech and Slovak titles separately) and classified by periodical titles. The collection has been listed on a gradual basis in compliance with the current library standards, and it is available for on-site

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use. In addition to the titles and subtitles of periodical publications, the catalogs also mention the names of the writers and editors, if known, as well as the format and the size, the place and duration of publication, and the list of the various books. The annotation, the information on the entire title (if complete) and the mention on the storage area of the periodical can also be found. You can find attached the electronic copies of the two catalogs as Annex I (CD—nomination)

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### 3.4 History/provenance

The main part of the collection of samizdat or unofficial periodicals being nominated consists of private collections published by Mr Jiří Gruntorád, Cofounder and Managing Director of the LIBRI PROHIBITI Library. They were carefully concealed during the totalitarian period of the years 1978-1989. This part has been expanded on a systematic basis from 1990 thanks to donations and purchases. The purchases were successful, mainly due to the fact that the instigator of the collection being nominated was an editor of samizdat titles—he was jailed as a consequence of this activity. The friendly relationship with other editors, Mr Václav Havel heading the list, made those efforts easier. Thus, we have been able to create the most significant and complete collection of Czech and Slovak samizdat collections in the world. This collection is stored in the LIBRI PROHIBITI Library, in the heart of Prague, of Czech Republic and of Europe.

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## 4.0 Legal information

### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

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Name	Address
Libri Prohibiti Society, Civic Association	Senovážné náměstí 2 110 00 Praha 1
Mr Jiří Gruntorád, Managing Director	Czech Republic

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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
00 420 224 225 971	00 420 224 225 971	libpro@iol.cz

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### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

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Name	Address
LIBRI PROHIBITI Library	Senovážné náměstí 2 110 00 Praha 1 Czech Republic

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Telephone	Facsimile	Email
00 420 224 225 971	00 420 224 225 971	libpro@iol.cz

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### **4.3 Legal status**

The legal and administrative liability of the preservation of the collection of Czech and Slovak samizdat periodicals from 1948 to 1989 is assumed by the Libri Prohibiti Society, Civic Association. The Libri Prohibiti has been registered with the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic under the reference number VS/1-6367/91-R.

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### **4.4 Accessibility**

The collection is accessible to the public in the study room of the LIBRI PROHIBITI specialized public Library, registered since 4/15/2003 with the Ministry of Culture of Czech Republic in compliance with law n°257/2001 of the collection, on libraries and the terms of operating public library and information services (Library Act). This law stipulates that the LIBRI PROHIBITI Library provides public library and information services, which includes, among other things, the accessibility of its holdings, i.e., the collection being nominated. Therefore, in this precise case, the goal is to make the collection available for study or research purposes, considering the unique aspect of this collection, and taking into account the provisions of law n°121/2000 of the Collection, on copyright and rights related to copyright, and on the amendment of certain laws (Copyright Act) under Czech legal regulations. As the digitization is currently ongoing, we are publishing the results by parts (if the law on copyright allows it), on the website of the library with wireless Internet access. (Also see other locations)

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### **4.5 Copyright status**

Given the copyright protection terms under Czech legal regulations (law n° 121/2000 of the Collection, on copyright and rights related to copyright, and on the amendment of certain laws (Copyright Act), some of the collection items must be considered as authored works and as such, they are subject to copyright protection under Czech legislation and under the country's international contractual obligations. So, we have to act in that way in cases of distribution of such works.

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## **5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria**

### **5.1 Authenticity**

The authenticity of the collection is ensured by the fact that its items are prints and transcripts from the Communist period, many of them with known “originators” or the initial owner.

The word “print” is used here to denote copies that could be made at home, under the requirements for accommodation, using equipment that served during the totalitarian regime for

the distribution of prohibited books, periodicals and documents. “Transcripts” are typescript copies that served the same purposes at that time.

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## **5.2 World significance**

In the second half of the 20th century, samizdat production was an important part of the unofficial culture in Communist countries.

The collection of samizdat periodicals being nominated, which is stored in the LIBRI PROHIBITI Library, is a world-unique collection of this remarkable creation including unique materials available nowhere else (and this unavailability is probably permanent given the nature of their production, limited to a small number of copies, of their distribution and preservation, particularly risky at the time of the totalitarian regime, and of the poor quality of the paper used). The collection is essential for the study of the history of the Central and Eastern Europe countries in the second half of the 20th century. If it came to disappear, it would be the loss of a concentrated source of information on the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Communist totalitarian era and the development of the independent thought of the official political power. The significance of the collection for the political change in former Czechoslovakia in 1989 and for the collapse of the Communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe and the transition to democracy is essential. As a matter of fact, those samizdat publications have prepared for decades the ground of ideas for a social and political change which led in Czechoslovakia to the Velvet Revolution and to the setting up of a democracy.

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## **5.3 Comparative criteria:**

*Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)*

### **1 Time**

The collection being nominated covers the period ranging from 1948 to 1989, i.e., from the beginning to the end of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia, with focus on resistance and opposition to this regime, and also on mass emigration—which was often just a way to stay alive. There is a whole array of samizdat periodicals dating back to this period. In the collection being nominated, almost brought together in its entirety, they provide unique information on the aforementioned period of the modern history—which is a fairly well delimited period over time (from February 1948, setting up of the Communist regime in former Czechoslovakia, to November 1989 with the Velvet Revolution and the fall of the Czechoslovak Communist regime). Any loss or impoverishment of the collection would constitute an irreversible damage of a unique source to pursue the historical and socio-scientific research, including the studies on the condition and dynamism of human rights.

### **2 Place**

The collection proposed for inscription on the Memory of the World Register, is unique as a whole. At present, it is located in Prague where most of the samizdat periodicals were created, and it focuses on its issue. With its relatively complete coverage and its focus, this collection has no equal in Europe or worldwide.

### **3 People**

Editors, contributors and authors of Czech and Slovak samizdat periodicals were mainly recruited among outstanding figures from the world of literature, art, music, science and politics. The collection being proposed covers almost entirely their activities and intellectual production for the period of 1948-1989 and thus, it offers good opportunities for comprehensive study and a source of documentation regarding the opposition and resistance movement against the Communist totalitarian regime in the countries of the Soviet bloc—former Czechoslovakia was a perfect example—as well as in many other countries all over the world where the best minds of the affected countries emigrated voluntarily or involuntarily. We can mention at least a few names such as Václav Havel, Jaroslav Seifert (Nobel Prize), Milan Kundera, Josef Škvorecký, Pavel Tigrid, Jiří Kolář and hundreds of others. This movement of intellectuals, described in the collection being nominated, strongly encouraged the transformation of the totalitarian states into democratic countries. It was probably the only one to represent systematically pre-totalitarian democratic traditions, spreading the free culture heritage and maintaining the cultural values.

#### **4 Subject and theme**

Thematically speaking, the collection of samizdat periodicals being nominated is very compact and unique. Indeed, it focuses on the internal resistance (e.g., dissidents at home) against the Communist totalitarian regime in states that were typical of the Soviet bloc, as former Czechoslovakia—which consists of Czech Republic and Slovak Republic today—used to be at the time. For researchers, students, journalists, politicians and everyone who has an interest in this issue, the thematic focus of the collection is a unique concentrated source of documents revealing the opposition to the totalitarian regime while showing how the totalitarian regime responded to this opposition, including the varying reactions and practices of the repression system in the global context.

In the science disciplines such as economics, natural sciences, philosophy and others, the collection being nominated offers through its thematic focus valuable opportunities to compare the views and opinions of the official scientific circles of the totalitarian regime regarding various scientific issues with the views and opinions held by scientists whose works and scientific texts could not be published for political reasons. Thanks to this thematic focus, this collection is also important for the history of science in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **5 Form and style**

The collection of samizdat periodical publications is a unique example of copying techniques and human inventiveness in the secret production of copies. It also shows the range of materials available in the situation that existed at that time, including the methods of bookbinding and finishing in terms of both design and handicraft, whose quality was often surprisingly high given the underground production. Many of the books contain original photographs, art prints as well as other types of illustrations.

#### **6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance**

The collection can be considered as relatively complete and as such it is unique in the world. It documents the Czechoslovak Third Resistance Movement<sup>1</sup> in the country, as well as in the whole world with significant links to the opposition activities in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This is why the collection is so important for educational and research activities, including basis which are currently under way for the sources of thesis that have already been written. The collection contributes to show the actual resistance against the Communist totalitarian regime. Thus, it helps strengthen national pride and identification.

### **6.0 Contextual information**

## **6.1 Rarity**

The collection is an exceptionally rare compilation of the historical sources for studies regarding the history of the totalitarian regimes in Central Europe in the second half of the 20th century, and the resistance against those regimes. The books, bulletins and circulars contained in this collection have been edited in Czech and Slovak outside the official structures, on the territory of former Czechoslovakia. The importance of the collection is strengthened by the very low print-run of the original samizdat prints (typescripts and duplicated copies of the time). Only one or a few copies were preserved as these prints and transcripts were often confiscated and destroyed, and their possession and distribution were prosecuted. Therefore, the collection is a fully unique source of studies of uncensored and informal activities within the totalitarian regime. (Also see Annex III)

## **6.2 Integrity**

The integrity of the collection is specified by the date and place of birth (i.e., Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1989). The Libri Prohibiti Society, C.A., is the only owner of the collection, which is available to the public through a specialized public library created to this end.

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<sup>1</sup> The Third Resistance Movement is the opposition movement to Communism from 1948 to 1989, with a brief period of time in between referred to as the Prague Spring (1968). The Czechoslovak modern history includes the notion of the First Resistance Movement which represents the fights for independence and the creation of the new Czechoslovak State. This period lasted until 1918, which was the year when an independent Czechoslovak State was created as one of the successors of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy; the notion of the Second Resistance Movement refers to the opposition movement to Nazis during World War II, that is to say from 1939 to 1945.