

CHRONICLE

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KOŠICE – JÁCHYMOV CONNECTION: FROM THE KOŠICE SITE OF MEMORY TO THE URANIUM CAMPS
KOŠICE, 24 JUNE 2025

On the occasion of the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Communist Regime and the fourth anniversary of the opening of the Museum of the Victims of Communism, an expert seminar “Odsúdení v Košiciach a väzni v Jáchymove” [Convicts in Košice and prisoners in Jáchymov] took place in Košice on 24 June 2025. The event focused on individuals sentenced by the Regional Court in Košice who were subsequently forced to work in the uranium mines of Jáchymov during their imprisonment. The first part of the event – the morning seminar – took place at the State Scientific Library in Košice on Pribinova 1, where the Museum of the Victims of Communism operates the exhibition of the Former Regional Investigation Prison of the State Security (ŠtB) in Košice. Guided tours for both domestic and foreign visitors are held regularly at this site of memory.

The expert seminar was opened by the director of the Museum of the Victims of Communism, Pavol Hric, and guests were also welcomed by the director of the library, PhDr. Darina Kožuchová. The opening lecture by Mgr. Josef Halla, PhD. from the Nation's Memory Institute, titled “Involuntarily ‘on uranium’. Sites Associated with Uranium Ore Mining – Mines and Camps”, presented a map of uranium camps in Czechoslovakia and their link to judicial processes that supplied them with labour. Halla highlighted the close ties between the judiciary and the economic demands of the Soviet agreement on uranium mining.

Miroslav Fico, from the Faculty of Law at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, followed with an analysis of the 1950 Penal Code as a tool of state violence. He emphasized how this legal framework legitimized punishments for so-called subversion of the Republic, economic sabotage or anti-state activities. He underlined the purpose of punishments under this law, such as “neutralizing enemies of the working people” and “having an educational effect on other members of society”, which helps explain the brutality of interrogations and the harsh conditions of imprisonment.

Jiří Myroniuk from Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem joined online with a presentation about the *Rovnost* camp, in which he described the everyday life of prisoners in the Jáchymov area. He portrayed the brutality of the guards and the system of collective punishments, as well as acts of solidarity among the prisoners.

After the break, Pavol Hric Jr., from the Faculty of Arts at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, in a presentation titled “Sentenced in Košice, Prisoners in Jáchymov”, shared specific cases of farmers, teachers, and priests from the Košice region who were interrogated and imprisoned in the very building where the seminar was held. This prison – now an authentic site of memory – thus becomes a direct witness of the repressive cycle: interrogation, sentencing, deportation.

Representing the Museum of the Victim of Communism, its research fellow Viliam Kačmár presented the political and economic background of the Czechoslovak–Soviet uranium mining agreement. This topic explained the need for a large number of prisoners to be used in the extraction of uranium for the Soviet Union's atomic program.

The final contribution of the seminar was a tribute to the recently beatified Slovak religious brother Ján Havlík – one of the many martyrs of Jáchymov whose health and later life were taken by the uranium camps.

As with every year since the opening of the exhibition at Pribinova 1, the seminar was followed by a commemorative event at the memorial plaque on the front of the building, where a wreath was placed and a prayer was offered for all who were unjustly imprisoned. A guided tour of the exhibition was also available for those interested.

The event continued with a memorial evening in which descendants of former political prisoners could share testimonies about relatives who were part of the “Jáchymov hell”. The event concluded with a screening of the film *On the Way to Perfection*, about the life of Blessed Ján Havlík, followed by a public discussion. The film explored the spiritual experience of prisoners and their efforts to maintain human dignity under conditions of total oppression.

The venue – the former ŠtB prison in Košice – came alive on this day as a living site of memory, serving not only as an exhibition space but also as a place for reflection on history in

today's world, and as a connection to another site of memory – the uranium mines of Jáchymov. This event once again confirmed the necessity of critical historical memory in Central Europe and the importance of commemorating those who were unjustly imprisoned and whose life stories are closely tied to specific locations – prisons, courts, and camps.

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