

AUTONOMY OF ARCHIVAL SERVICE

I have a special honor to welcome you in Dubrovnik, the town whose phrase *Libertas* is written on its ancient flag. *Libertas* is another name for independence, sovereignty and autonomy. This town has been preserving that autonomy for centuries in very difficult historical contexts and its unique archives is a testimony of the City Republic's past and an evidence of all countries to which it has been communicating with as well. That was a reason to choose Dubrovnik to be a place of the conference on "Autonomy and Integrity of Archives". Later on, at the proposal of the Council of Europe, the conference subject had been extended to "the destruction and reconstruction of archives". Primarily, by this was meant destruction that had been happening on the territory of the former Yugoslavia during the last nine years.

The idea to elaborate this subject emerged from considerations on archival service's position in the countries of former communist society. That does not mean that the subject is topical for transition countries only. In many aspects, it can be of interest for archives and archival services in countries of western democracy. The idea about the conference dedicated to autonomy of archives has been supported by the ICA/EUR (International Council on Archives, Coordinating Board for European Program). Mr. Erick Norberg, president of the ICA/EUR and director of the Swedish National Archives and the ICA/EUR secretary, Mr. Patrick Cadell, director of the Scottish Record Office gave their special support on realization of this meeting. We have been gradually building a framework of this subject on regular ICA/EUR meetings, and it got its final look after a survey had been conducted in all European countries. The survey had shown a whole range of problems referring to this subject that are common to all countries and their archival services.

One of the most significant segments of these problems is clearly stressed in the first article of the archivists' Code of Ethics, which had been accepted three years ago at the International Conference on Archives in Beijing: "*Archivists should protect the integrity of archive material... The objectivity and impartiality of archivists is measure of their professionalism*". In conclusion of the Code of Ethics, it is explicitly said: "*They should resist any pressure from any source to manipulate evidence so as to conceal or distort facts*". The autonomy of archival service is essential to preserve integrity of records as a reflection of objectivity, integrity, and impartiality during entire process of record creation. Let us be free to say that professional archival service is another name for that autonomy. It excludes any influence of political ideology on archive service, and consequently selection, preservation and access to records. On the other hand, it is necessary to ensure all prerequisites to realize the goal, but in the way that another request put by the Code in its 8th article can be achi-

eved: *"Archivists should not allow people outside the profession to interfere in their practice and obligations"*.

Archivists autonomy guarantee, accordingly, professionalism instead of political control; objectivity instead of redecorating of the past due to the particular political ideologies; comprehensiveness in the protection of archives instead of emphasizing only one segment of the past; and equal access to archives for all researchers instead of privileged access to information to some individuals. In one word, the autonomy of archives can be reduced to "objective protection and use of world archival heritage" so that archives keep historical evidences, and they not become tools of propaganda or some ideology. In the end, archival service can guarantee the truth about the past, for the future generations, only if autonomy will be realized – independence of archival service – and also the full professionalization of the occupation. Because nobody has a right to hide the truth about the past by destroying tracks of historical memory or by reshaping the full truth about him.

In the EU Draft Recommendations on access to archives it is said explicitly that a country has earned the fullness of democracy only then when its every resident has a possibility to inform himself about elements of his or hers history in the objective way.

The idea about conference on "autonomy and integrity" of archival material, as I've already stressed, was in the first place inspired by the experience of transition countries of former communist systems. Totalitarian ideology did everything possible to have control over archives as sources of information. Let us mention only few elements of archival service organization and work in those countries.

a) The first and basic element of archival control had been manifested in personnel policy. It was almost impossible to imagine that a person, who had not been a member of the party, could become a director of an archives. Political qualification has been put above the professional commitment and competence. This is not a question of a type of organization where managers carry responsible duties and coordinate work of professionals, but about a system of control implemented through, so called, personnel policy. Such system created a directed control and inspection over archival institutions. It seems that even after the collapse of totalitarian systems this matter has been left open even in the countries of developed democracy.

b) The second element of control in totalitarian systems consisted of a selective approach to records, which has leading toward a system that can be called "a suppressed history". As history has been in the function of politics, documents – especially those regarding contemporary history – were strictly watched. A complete access had been enabled only to "state historians". Only future investigations will show what influence the policy of "suppressed history" have had on development of mentality but also on political development in some countries: hidden and suppres-

sed truth has been creating false picture of the past. Very often, hidden and suppressed truth was also a source for manipulation of history and a way of suppression of democratic development. And even more than that. As some truth had been hidden and it has not been allowed to know the whole historical truth, it has left disastrous consequences especially within the multi-national countries. Some historical persons could even not be mentioned and facts have been suppressed and evidences hidden. For example, when exhibitions have been designed, some faces had just been cut out from photographs, because they have been excommunicated from the historical memory. Hard rule from the Roman period "nomen memoriae domnatum" – name to which every track should be destroyed, had been applied to such persons. Particular documents that have been throwing light, different than official one, had been hidden from eyes of objective historians and public.

Let us note here the exhibition organized under the title "Prohibited history", by the Czech's press agency ČTK, in the year 1998 (com. *Vjesnik*, October 28, 1998), which very well illustrates archives dependence on politics. The exhibition showed a representative selection of censored photographs and documents, from the ČKT Archives, in the period of the totalitarian regime of the German protectorate 1939–1945 and period of communism 1948–1989. The exhibition presents photographs that were censored in various ways and different levels, as for example "it is not allowed to publish", "no use", "censored", "unsuitable person", "forbidden", and similarly. Unsuitable persons have been retouched on many photographs, persons that, during "the course of history", from the most eminent leaders become "national enemies".

c) Autonomy of archives has also its deeper roots: it begins with understanding of archive service and archivistics as a scientific discipline and with application of some fundamental archival principles (like is appraisal of records), and with priorities put by archive service of a particular country. An example may be found in the arrangement of archives so that it could be available to the public (priority of arrangement).

Maybe the most drastic example of ideologized archive service is expressed in the textbook "Archivistik" from ex DDR written in '80s. That textbook is a valuable contribution to the development of archivistics from a professional and scientific point of views. However, since it was created in a specific political system it is completely ideologized, all theory and praxis have been subordinated to the theories of Marxism and Leninism as an basic standard for archival appraisal and arrangement. Archivistics and archival service have been conceived as a part of that ideologized system. However, more ominous than those ideologized propositions (which today can easily be threw out from the textbook and the book has its values) have been its consequences on the archival service development. Therefore practical consequen-

ces, that were significant for protection and arrangement of archives, have followed such ideologically archivistics, established as a science. Firstly, a concept of categorization of record owners has been given, that is an establishment of priorities that should be emphasized in the archival practice. Here priority has been given to the ruling political party as a main "holder of historical development." Therefore, absolute advantage has been given to only one category of records. Records appraisal system has been defined in that respect, which has only serving an ideologized archivistics. Evaluation of records did not follow objective criteria, proper to archivistics as a science, but was established on the "out profession" principles that were imposed by politics.

For example on the territory of former Yugoslavia such ideologized approach has not been present in the archival theory, but was asserted by archive practice. I shall mention two facts only. In practice, archival records that have been significant for "revolutionary, progressive movements and trends" have had advantage in arrangement. Some categories of records (these containing information on socialist revolution, especially in the World War II) have been arranged in detail, while the arrangement of records that did not have evidence on "progressive movement" was in the second place. The second case relates to the appraisal of records. The *Rules on Appraisal and Disposal of Current Records in the Republic of Croatia*, 1981, in the Article 6 explicitly say "Current records groups created by organs and organizations of the NOB (National Liberation Struggle) should be preserved wholly, and elimination is not allowed. Parts or fragments of such wholes should be preserved in the same way. During disposal of records created in XIX respectively XX century preserved should be those records containing information that in any way reflects history of labor movement, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the National liberation Struggle" (*Narodne novine SRH*, 36/1981).

Such example of evaluation is not isolated in the countries of former communist system. Evaluation of records concerning forbidden movements, especially ones in Africa has been discussed at the Round Table in Washington. The information referring to some revolutionary movements has been destroyed.

At this conference, the problems concerning autonomy of archives will be discussed in the broad spectrum of issues that are of importance not only for transition countries but also for the majority of European countries. Entire problems referring to the autonomy of archives could be focused on the following issues, which are today topical in all countries:

a) Scientific and professional autonomy. Some papers will present the issue that can be conditionally named "scientific and professional autonomy of archive practice and theory". The first question is whether archivistics is independent discipline or is an auxiliary historical science. In that context we can also raise a question

about the autonomy of archival profession: autonomous education and professionalization of archival service at all levels: at records creators and in historical archives. That first claim requires autonomously organized archival education and affirmation of independent profession different from those of a historian or an informatician.

Complex "scientific and professional autonomy" includes also defining autonomous policy of appraisal and disposal, acquisition policy, and finally policy on access to archives.

Policy concerning *appraisal and disposal* asks to define the one who should be responsible for the final destiny of documents. Approach to autonomy of archives selection requests the definition of professional criteria and creation of standards which would determine as much as possible objectivity in the selection of archives as a part of national memory and evidence of past.

Profession must have final word in appraisal and disposal of archives in an autonomous archival service. In that respect, it should have all competencies, even the possibility of sanctions, in case of an unauthorized destruction of archival records.

Acquisition policy is based on systematic, scientific and professional evaluation of all functions of a specific country and protection of the integrity of documentation as a part of national archival heritage. Final decision on acquisition policy belongs to professional archival service. Wide privatization process of many sectors of public life puts new challenges for archival service.

Finally, in the complex of professional and scientific autonomy goes *an equal freedom of access to archives*. Access to archives should not depend on subjectivity but must be based on objectivity, equal for all. Here the issue related to declassification of documents, which should be regulated equally for all users, is especially significant.

b) Administration autonomy. Scientific and professional autonomy of archives is not possible without the autonomy of archive administration and professionalization of archivists. In most of the European countries, archival service is under the jurisdiction of ministries of culture. Since archival records are created in all sectors and it is not important only and exclusively for cultural purposes, it is impossible to realize total autonomy of archive service without autonomous administration of archival service. Such autonomous administration is responsible to create professional archive policy and national archival programs. It looks like that development of archival administration should gravitate toward inter-ministerial, which means that the archive administration should be in explicit jurisdiction of prime minister or an autonomous administration like is for example Geodetska uprava (Geodesy Administration) and similar. It should be useful to reexamine present European and world

practice and analyze the influence of administrative position of archive service to its autonomy.

c) Archivistics and historiography. At this conference special attention will be paid to the relation between archives and historiography. In the root of "suppressed and forbidden history" is usually a non-autonomous archive service. Privileged access to documents that only several "state historians" have got is a cause of creation of incorrect historical picture as a product of so called "state historiography."

d) Financial autonomy. It is almost impossible to realize all demands of archive service and models of autonomy if certain material base for financing of archival service and repositories are not assured, which are fundamental assumptions for autonomous development of archival service. Human and financial recourses, which are at some archival service disposal, represent necessary assumption for realization of that autonomy. That has been the reason why the majority of European countries ensure financial recourses, necessary for work of their archive services, from the state budget. By this is also meant insurance of storage space for record acquisition. We cannot talk about archives' autonomy if financial means and adequate storage space are not ensured. To that we should add a necessity of university education of an adequate number of professional archivists who will help, with their professionalism, preserving the truth about the past or "integral memory" through entire process, from record creation up to its use.

Although the stimulus for elaborating these problems was given by transition countries, problem of autonomy is not less topical, in our opinion, in other European countries. The new technologically development of electronic records poses the problem more actually. Only really autonomous and professional archive service will be able to answer to its always permanent requests: preserve as much as possible of authentic and objective MEMORY OF THE PRESENT TIMES and the truth about ourselves regardless to political and any other systems and ideologies. More concretely: to preserve OBJECTIVE INFORMATION about this time and make it available to the widest circle of people within democratic society.

We could say in the conclusion: autonomy of archive service is another name for its professionalism.

On an initiative of the Council of Europe, as a subject of this meeting, we have also included problems of destruction and reconstruction of archives as memory of nations. By this is primarily meant destruction caused by war conflicts, the ones that ruled on territories of the former Yugoslavia in the last ten years. From one point of view archives destruction is an attack on the autonomy of archival service. Physical and cultural goods of others are devastated and disintegrated by destruction. It imperils the archival service from outside. In this area, we had a bitter experience of destruction, deliberately and not deliberately. I would like to remind that three inflam-

mable shells hit the roof of the Archives in Dubrovnik. Fortunately, archival records important not only for wider area of Dubrovnik's hinterland, but also for the whole Mediterranean and Europe had not been destroyed. I would also like to mention another bright example that took place in Karin near Zadar: a Franciscan Monastery had been deliberately razed to ground during the war. But among those who participate in devastation of the monastery was also an individual who earlier had evacuated monastery's archives and library.

National memory is that what enables communication between nations, remembrance of past and creation of history continuation. Destruction demolishes traces of past and connections. Archives destruction is also an attempt to kill the truth but only the truth can liberate us from many historical burdens. Only the truth enables creation of ways of future.

We would like our conference to help in affirmation of complete autonomy of archives. We hope that not only speakers will contribute to that but as well all the other who will take an active part in the work of this meeting with their discussions in their full professional responsibility.