

## THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF NORMALIZATION

### The Jewish Community as a Mirror for the Majority Society

Prague 31 March 2017 -- **New exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Prague marks 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Charter 77**

The period after the armies of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was called by communist ideologues “normalization.” Under the watchful eye of Soviet military occupation, Czechoslovak society was to return to “normal,” that is, to a rigid ideological socialism with a single political force having an unchallenged monopoly of power and wholly subject to Moscow’s dictates.

True to its anti-Semitic traditions, Soviet propaganda labeled the political liberalization in Czechoslovakia from 1967 to 1968 a Zionist conspiracy, alluding to the show trials of the 1950s. The Kremlin considered a Zionist anyone with Jewish ancestry or who associated with Jews. Many Czechoslovak communists adopted this formulation, and after an interval of many years, State Security once again began to compile lists of names of those with Jewish heritage for “operational usage” in the fight against Zionism.

Citizens designated by the communist regime as Zionist, no matter if they considered themselves Jewish or not, began to encounter a variety of problems, the reasons for which they were often unaware. Jewish communities, which operated under the direct supervision of state bodies, experienced enormous pressure, as did other religious institutions, and, as was the case with the population at large, their officials were subjected to extensive vetting and purging.

This exhibition presents several chapters in this history, stones picked out from the total mosaic. We believe it will serve as inspiration for a deeper examination of life in the Jewish communities under the political monopoly of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during the era of late state socialism.

The exhibition was curated by the film documentarist Martin Šmok and produced by the Jewish Museum in Prague in cooperation with the Security Services Archive and the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. It will run between 6 April 2017 – 28 Jan 2018. An English language exhibition catalogue is available.

**Meeting with curators and photo op:** 5 April 2017 at 3 p.m.

**Exhibition opening:** 5 April 2017 at 5 p.m.

**Photographs for download incl. © information and captions:**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B-XAXScL8rQfQnYzV3c4QVA2ZDg?usp=sharing>

or <https://we.tl/bvCRG2IQIK>

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**Jewish Museum in Prague – Robert Guttmann Gallery, U Staré školy 3, Prague 1**

**Open daily 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.** except Saturdays and other Jewish holidays

**Admission:** regular CZK 40, reduced CZK 20, children under 6 free of charge

## Notes for editors on the Jewish Museum in Prague

1. The Jewish Museum in Prague is the largest museum of its kind in Europe and has one of the most extensive collections of Judaica in the world, with as many as 40,000 unique items and 100,000 books, photographs and archival documents. The museum oversees four historic synagogues, the Ceremonial Hall, the world-famous Old Jewish Cemetery, a gallery, several depositories, an archive, a library with multimedia centre, restoration workshops and an educational/cultural centre.
2. The Jewish Museum in Prague is consistently among the top three most visited museums in the Czech Republic. In 2016 it attracted nearly 660,000 visitors.
3. This year, the Jewish Museum in Prague is celebrating its 111<sup>th</sup> year. The original aim of the Association for the Founding and Maintaining of a Jewish Museum in Prague, in 1906, was to preserve valuable artefacts from Prague synagogues that were earmarked for demolition as part of the redevelopment of the area of Prague's Jewish Town at the turn of the nineteenth century. The museum remained open to the public even after the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia on 15 March 1939, although the museum association was disbanded after the outbreak of the Second World War. After lengthy negotiations in 1942, the Nazi authorities approved the founding of the Central Jewish Museum in Prague. Liturgical objects from all the defunct Jewish communities and synagogues throughout the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia were assembled here at the same time that transports were being dispatched to the ghettos, concentration camps and death camps. The museum's collections were placed under national administration after war and forcibly taken into state ownership in 1950. Its activities were officially restricted and certain items were sold off – including more than a thousand Torah scrolls, which were shipped to the United Kingdom in 1965. The conditions for a new stage in the museum's development came about only after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989. The museum regained its independence in 1994, since when it has continued to familiarize the general public with the past, present and culture of the Jewish community in the Czech Republic.
4. The museum's Robert Guttman Gallery is a venue for the presentation of temporary exhibitions of a thematic nature. It is named after the well-known Prague naive painter Robert Guttman (1880-1942), whose work was featured in the first exhibition. The gallery is located on the ground floor in the north-east section of the museum's headquarters at U Staré školy 3.
5. A substantial part of the museum's work involves developing educational and cultural activities. Its educational programmes are intended for a wide variety of target groups. The youngest children can become acquainted with Jewish culture, traditions and customs in a playful way at the museum. Interactive programmes and lectures are provided for elementary and secondary school pupils. There are also regular educational seminars for teachers and evening educational programmes for the general public. Travelling exhibitions are available for schools and cultural institutions.

[www.jewishmuseum.cz](http://www.jewishmuseum.cz)

