

**The speech presented at the IFLAPARL pre-conference on 16 August 2017  
on the “Archives of the Breakthrough 1989-1991” project**

The fundamental objective of the “Archives of the Breakthrough 1989-1991” project is preservation of the memory of events which changed Poles’ lives. These events made it possible for Poland to enter the path towards full sovereignty. The period of 1980s and 1990s was marked by numerous civic initiatives, and various electoral campaigns: self-government, presidential and parliamentary ones. The “Archives of the Breakthrough 1989-1991” document diverse forms of civic engagement of that period which focused on the creation of political, social and economic life in every part of our country. They draw a cohesive picture of achievements and changes undergone by our country in the transformation period, i.e. the aforementioned Breakthrough.

The Project originated in the Senate Archives. Its roots go back to the period of 1991-1993, when the Senate Archives began to collect documentation which already at that point had shown the signs of having historical and archival significance. The archivists’ intuitively undertaken attempts to secure these resources during the change of the system made it possible, for example, for the collection of the Civic Parliamentary Club to be stored in the Senate of the Republic of Poland.

From 2001, the Senate Archive has emphasized that the files concerning the transformation period gathered in this collection are of such importance in the context of the history of the twentieth century that they should be made available to researchers.

The final impulse to return to these valuable materials was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rebirth of the Senate and the parliamentary elections of 4 June 1989, which coincided with the spike in researchers’ interest in the collection in 2008 and 2009. The archivists were mobilised to “dust off” the archival materials related to the history of the systemic transformation. The “Archives of the Breakthrough 1989-1991” project was initiated by the Chancellery of the Senate, which established it and invited the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland to participate in the project.

Knowing that the resources kept by the Archive of the Senate of the Republic of Poland and the Archive of the President of the Republic of Poland constitute only part of what remained of the breakthrough period, we began searching for more materials. The starting point for the search was the project titled “The Archive of the Oral History of the Senate” which was carried out by the Office for Citizen Relations of the Chancellery of the Senate in cooperation with the Warsaw Uprising Museum. Archivists, employees of the

Communication Department and a film crew visited the first term senators, recording film notations and asking senators for souvenirs, documents, posters, photographs, etc. connected with the period of the political transformation of the 1980s and 1990s. Twenty-eight senators provided their witness testimonies concerning the transformation period, and the archivists received contact information to activists in regions.

The basic purpose of the Project is to create an electronic, publicly accessible repository of the collection.

In order to achieve this objective, the Project includes the following tasks:

- ✓ collecting archival resources (documents, photographs, audio recordings, video recordings, and exhibits) from the transformation period;
- ✓ securing and protecting the collection;
- ✓ consolidating digital copies of the collection in the database;
- ✓ providing information about the distribution of the collection in Poland and abroad;
- ✓ running the dedicated website;
- ✓ providing access to the collection via an on-line catalogue of the Project's resources by creating an interactive search engine for the collection;
- ✓ cooperating with scientific institutions, researchers specialising in the transition period, and witnesses of this period;
- ✓ promoting knowledge about the country's recent history.

These tasks are carried out by, among other things, taking "trips" to other parts of Poland to assess the collections of other institutions and organising "searches" of home archives of private individuals.

During these trips, we not only acquire new partners, but also gather information about collections, recording the memories of activists, beginning with senators, acquiring sources that we often rent from their keepers for scanning, and frequently also obtaining original materials for the archives.

Currently, we cooperate with **90 institutions and 62 private individuals**, including: activists and witness of the events of 1980s and 1990s, state archives, libraries, regional trade unions of Solidarność, documentation centres operating at municipal offices, as well as institutions such as the Institute of National Remembrance, the Polish Academy of Science, and the European Solidarity Centre.

Out of our partners, **29 institutions** have provided us with **119,060 pages of materials**, and **55 private individuals** provided us with **69,897 pages of documentation**.

We collect all kind of archival materials: files, photographs, audio-visual documentation, including films and audio recordings, as well as exhibits, newspapers, postage stamps and other memorabilia, which not only tell the political history of the 1980s and 1990s in Poland, but also give insight into the transformations in the sphere of culture, economy, and social circumstances.

As I have already mentioned, the emerging “Archives of the Breakthrough” constitute a collection of sources which we publish on-line on our website: [www.archiwaprzelomu.pl](http://www.archiwaprzelomu.pl).

We widely use the Internet and the dedicated website to popularise our Project. We have created a website where we not only publish information about the Project itself, but also provide data about the location of collections that are of interest to the Project, using Google Maps.

Between November 2014 and 21 July 2017, our website was accessed by **38,114 visitors**.

We organized 5 nationwide seminars, and the last one was dedicated to the review of archives, libraries and museums run by Polish diasporas for the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Archives of the Breakthrough 1989-1991” project. The meeting was attended by representatives of scientific centres from: Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Austria, Canada, United States, Germany, and Belarus.

We organize and participate in such events as thematic conferences, archival picnics, as well as historical and archival competitions.

We are also proud of our publications, including “Teki Archiwalne” (Archival Records), post-seminar publications, as well as jubilee and information publications.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the internal organisation of the Project. The Management Board of the Project manages work related to the project and consists of the Head of the Chancellery of the Senate and the Head of the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland; the Programme Council is an advisory and opinion-giving body composed of experts in the field of historical sciences, archival science, and copyright law, as well as witnesses of the transformation; the Coordination Team consist of archivists from the Archive of the Senate and the Archive of the President of the Republic of Poland who carry out the assumptions of the Project in practice.

In conclusion, I encourage you to not only review the website of our project, but to consider possible cooperation between our institutions, as part of the implementation of the “Archives of the Breakthrough” project. Expanding our collection catalogue through inclusion of contacts and materials from, foremost, institutions run by Polish diasporas, with whom

some of you most likely cooperate, would be incredibly valuable for us. We also welcome any possibilities to exchange information on the so-called good practices that all our institutions individually by carrying out research and development projects.