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Life's Jubilee of Professor Mečislav Borák

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Earlier this year, Professor Mečislav Borák, a well-known historian, museologist and university lecturer, but also a journalist and scriptwriter, celebrated his 70th birthday. Born on 31 January 1945 in Růžďka near Vsetín, he spent most of his childhood and youth in Frýdek-Místek, where he finished a general secondary school. Having graduated from the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University in Prague, he returned to the region of Ostrava; as a fresh journalist, he did not want to participate in the “normalisation,” which was just beginning at that time, and chose to work as a psychologist and social worker for the artisans’ cooperative “Zlatník” in Ostrava. In 1972, he received a doctoral degree at his *alma mater* for a work on the history of Catholic press in the Czech Lands, definitely not a preferred topic in those days. Since the mid-1970s, he worked as a historian specialising in modern history for the Silesian Land Museum in Opava, and later also at the Silesian Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic) in Opava, where he received his “Candidate of Historical Sciences” degree for a work on anti-Nazi resistance in the region of Těšín/Czieszyn, Silesia. After November 1989, he lectured at Ostrava University, the Silesian University in Opava, and Palacký University in Olomouc, where he habilitated in 2001. In 1993, he started working for the Silesian Land Museum again; in 2000, he began cooperating with the Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims, at that time a part of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech

Republic. In 2004, he joined the Faculty of Philosophy and Science of the Silesian University in Opava, where he was appointed Professor of Czechoslovak and Czech history five years later. He now works in the Institute of Central European Studies of the Faculty of Public Policies of the Silesian University in Opava, and is still active in the Silesian Land Museum as well as in the Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims in Prague.

Borák's research and publication activities¹ have typically focused on the historical region of Těšín and the Czech part of Silesia; however, he has successfully stepped out beyond the regional boundaries and linked the regional dimension with the nationwide and international context, just as he has done with different micro- and macro-historical aspects. He has always been interested in fate of ordinary, "small" people, seemingly forever lost in "grand" history, and he managed to set their life stories into a more general framework of the "grand" history in an attractive and even novel-like manner. He keeps coming back to topics that caught his attention earlier, each time presenting new facts and insights to review and expand his previous conclusions and existing knowledge of history.

The above mentioned characteristics were demonstrated as early as during the research of the Životice tragedy and Nazi crimes committed in the region of Těšín, starting at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s and continuing in the following decades, which ranked Mečislav Borák among historians specialising in the occupation and resistance movement.² His professional interest gradually expanded to include the entire occupied region of Ostrava and the Czech part of Silesia in a broader context of Czech Lands and Central Europe.³ In this respect, he also devoted his attention to the 1938–1939 period, from the clarification of the controversial topic of the Polish

1 Publication and partly also other activities of Mečislav Borák are described in biographic medallions and articles published on various occasions, the most recent list of which is presented in: FRIEDL, Jiří: Profesor Mečislav Borák jubilující [Professor Mečislav Borák's Jubilee]. In: *Slovanský přehled*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (2015), pp. 234–237; JANÁK, Dušan: K jubileu profesora Mečislava Boráka [On the Jubilee of Professor Mečislav Borák]. In: *Slezský sborník*, Vol. 113, No. 1 (2015), pp. 174–188. The latter contains probably the most detailed analysis of Professor Mečislav Borák's activities; I will therefore mention only his most important works in this article.

2 See, for example, BORÁK, Mečislav: *Zločin v Životicích* [The Crime in Životice]. Ostrava, Profil 1980 and 1984 (2nd edition); IDEM: *Na příkaz gestapa: Nacistické válečné zločiny na Těšínsku* [As the Gestapo Commands: Nazi War Crimes in Těšín, Silesia]. Ostrava, Profil 1990; IDEM: *Svědectví ze Životic: Těšínsko za druhé světové války a okolnosti životické tragédie* [A Testimony of Životice. The Těšín Region during the Second World War and the Circumstances of the Životice Tragedy]. Český Těšín, Muzeum Těšínska 1999.

3 See, for example, IDEM: *Odboj proti nacistickým okupantům na Ostravsku v letech 1939–1945* [The Resistance against Nazi Occupiers in the Region of Ostrava between 1939 and 1945]. In: *Ostrava: Příspěvky k dějinám a výstavbě Ostravy a Ostravska* [Ostrava: A Contribution to the History and Development of Ostrava and Its Region], No. 16. Ostrava, Profil 1991, pp. 30–54; IDEM: *Evropská dimenze dějin Slezska v letech 1938–1945* [A European Dimension of the History of Silesia 1938–1945]. In: JIRÁSEK, Zdeněk et al.: *Evropská dimenze slezských dějin* [The European Dimension of Silesian History]. Opava, Slezská univerzita v Opavě 2009, pp. 97–101.

occupation of the region of Těšín⁴ to Czechoslovakia's defence of Ruthenia. His principal results included analyses of the state and tasks of research and historical syntheses of the period between 1938 and 1945.⁵ However, Mečislav Borák also introduced a number of hitherto unknown stories and events from this period.⁶ Between 2001 and 2006, as a member and the Chairman of the Appellate Committee for the Compensation of Forced Labourers by the Czech Council for Victims of Nazism and the Czech-German Fund for the Future, he prepared essential studies on forced labour of the Poles in the Third Reich and on so-called *Polenlagers*.⁷ However, his works also clearly reflect other topics related to the region of Těšín in different periods of time, for example the Czechoslovak-Polish border dispute of the region

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- 4 See, for example, IDEM (ed.): Zábor Těšínska v říjnu 1938 a první fáze delimitace hranic mezi Československem a Polskem: Výběr dokumentů [The Annexation of Těšín in October 1938 and the First Phase of the Delimitation of the Border Between Czechoslovakia and Poland: A Selection of Documents]. In: *Časopis Slezského zemského muzea, série B*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1997), pp. 206–248; IDEM: Starcie zbrojne polskiego i czechosłowackiego wojska pod Czacą 25 listopada 1938 roku. In: KOWALSKI, Robert (ed.): *Od Zaolzia po Jaworzynę: Rewindykacje graniczne jesieni 1938 roku*. Nowy Targ, Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne 2004, pp. 69–100; IDEM: Obrana Podkarpatské Rusi (říjen 1938 – březen 1939) [Defence of Ruthenia (October 1938 – March 1939)]. In: GONĚC, Vladimír (ed.): *Československá historická ročenka 1997* [Czecho-Slovak Historical Yearbook 1997]. Brno, Masaryk University 1997, pp. 165–178.
- 5 See, for example, IDEM: Těšínské Slezsko v rámci okupovaného pohraničí v letech 1938–1945 [Těšín Silesia as Part of the Occupied Border Regions 1938–1945]. In: RADVANOVSKÝ, Zdeněk (ed.): *Historie okupovaného pohraničí 1938–1945* [History of the Occupied Border Regions 1938–1945], Vol. 11. Ústí nad Labem, Univerzita J. E. Purkyně 2006, pp. 83–135; IDEM: České Slezsko 1938–1945 [Czech Silesia 1938–1945]. In: GAWRECKI, Dan et al. *Dějiny Českého Slezska 1740–2000* [History of Czech Silesia 1740–2000], Vol. 2. Opava, Slezská univerzita v Opavě 2003, pp. 369–404.
- 6 IDEM: Oskar Schindler ve službách abwehru na Ostravsku [Oskar Schindler in the Service of the Abwehr in the Region of Ostrava]. In: *Ostrava. Příspěvky k dějinám a současnosti Ostravy a Ostravska* [Ostrava: A Contribution to the History and Development of Ostrava and the Region of Ostravsko], No. 21. Ostrava, Profil 2003, pp. 246–262; IDEM: Rozvědčík z Ostravy u Hitlerova “Vlíčího doupěte”: Neznámé válečné osudy Jana Borovce (1923–1944?) [A Spy from Ostrava in Hitler's “Wolf's Lair”: Unknown War Fates of Jan Borovec (1923–1944?)]. In: *Ostrava: Příspěvky k dějinám a současnosti Ostravy* [Ostrava: A Contribution to the History and Development of Ostrava and the Region of Ostravsko], No. 26. Ostrava, Profil 2012, pp. 50–81, etc.
- 7 IDEM: Nucené nasazení Poláků na práce do Říše v letech 1939–1945 (s přihlédnutím k Polákům z Těšínska) [Forced Labour of the Poles in the Reich in 1939–1945 (Taking into Account the Poles from Těšín)]. In: *Slezský sborník*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (2001), pp. 95–108; IDEM: Tábory pro Poláky ve Slezsku (1939, 1942–1945) [Camps for the Poles in Silesia (1939, 1942–1945)]. In: PAŽOUT, Jaroslav – KOKOŠKA, Stanislav – KOKOŠKOVÁ, Zdenka (ed.): *Museli pracovat pro Říši: Nucené pracovní nasazení českého obyvatelstva v letech 2.světové války. Sborník ze semináře konaného ve Státním ústředním archivu v Praze dne 2.dubna 2004* [They Had to Work for the Reich: Forced Labour of the Czech Population during the Second World War. A Collection of the Seminar Held in the National Archive on 2 April 2004]. Praha, Národní archiv 2004, pp. 124–137.

of Těšín in 1918–1920,⁸ or transformations of Czechoslovak-Polish and Czech-Polish relations in the region of in question.⁹

After 1989, Mečislav Borák has become one of the most prominent figures of research projects studying political repressions of the population since the late 1930s till the mid-1950s in Czechoslovakia and also in Central and Eastern Europe in general. He participated in the research of internment forms of political persecution in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War, in particular of various forms of internment camps and camp systems.¹⁰ He became the pioneer of research of the so-called retribution justice and his extensive monograph of 1998 was the first-ever comprehensive work on the issue in Czech historiography and is still used as a fundamental source for any research project examining the People's Courts.¹¹ A specific thematic circuit was represented by his research of the Holocaust and various forms of persecution of the Jewish population, including the first deportations of European Jews in transports from Moravská Ostrava to Nisko on the San between 1939 and 1940.¹² Another key topic of Borák was the Katyń crime of 1940 and its victims originating from the Czech Lands, in particular the Poles from or with a relation to Těšín, Silesia. After the publication of the first Czech monograph on the crime and an extensive work

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- 8 BORÁK, Mečislav – ŽÁČEK, Rudolf: *Ukradené vesnice: Musí Češi platit za osm slovenských obcí?* [Stolen Villages: Must the Czechs Pay for Eight Slovak Villages?]. Český Těšín, Těšínské muzeum – Sfinga 1993; BORÁK, Mečislav: Der polnisch-tschechische Konflikt um das Teschener Schlesien. Die "tschechische" Perspektive. In: BAHLCKE, Joachim – GAWRECKI, Dan – KACZMAREK, Ryszard (Hrsg.). *Geschichte Oberschlesiens. Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Oldenbourg, De Gruyter 2015, pp. 631–638. (Schriften des Bundesinstituts für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa, Band 61.)
- 9 See, for example, IDEM: Památník letecké tragédie v Těrlicku – symbol proměn česko-polských vztahů na Těšínsku v letech 1932–1938 [Memorial of the Air Tragedy in Těrlicko – a Symbol of the Changes of the Czech–Polish Relations in Těšín Silesia 1932–1938]. In: *Časopis Slezského zemského muzea, série B*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (2002), pp. 269–288.
- 10 BORÁK, Mečislav – JANÁK, Dušan: *Tábory nucené práce v ČSR 1948–1954* [Forced Labour Camps in Czechoslovakia 1948–1954]. Šenov u Ostravy, Slezský institut Slezského zemského muzea v Opavě – Tilia 1996; BORÁK, Mečislav: Internáční tábor "Hanke" v Moravské Ostravě v roce 1945 [The Internment Camp "Hanke" in Moravská Ostrava in 1945]. In: *Ostrava: Příspěvky k dějinám a současnosti Ostravy a Ostravska* [Ostrava: A Contribution to the History and Development of Ostrava and the Region of Ostravsko], No. 18 (1997), pp. 88–124; IDEM: Fenomén tzv. vojenských táborů nucené práce v Československu a jeho mezinárodní souvislosti [The Phenomenon of the So-Called Military Camps of Forced Labour in Czechoslovakia and Its International Context]. In: *Slezský sborník*, Vol. 98, No. 1–2 (2000), pp. 78–92.
- 11 IDEM: *Spravedlnost podle dekretu: Retribuční soudnictví v českých zemích a Mimořádný lidový soud v Ostravě 1945–1948* [Justice by Decree. Retributive Justice in the Czech Lands and the People's Court in Ostrava (1945–1948)]. Šenov u Ostravy, Tilia 1998.
- 12 IDEM: *Transport do tmy: První deportace evropských Židů* [Transport into the Darkness: The First Deportation of European Jews], with a foreword by Václav Havel. Ostrava, Moravskoslezský den 1994; IDEM: *První deportace evropských Židů: Transporty do Niska nad Sanem (1939–1940)* [The First Deportation of European Jews: Transports to Nisko on the San (1939–1940)], 2nd reworked edition. Ostrava – Šenov u Ostravy, Tilia 2009.

on the victims of Katyń in Polish,¹³ the search for and registration of the victims went on, along with the work on a series of subtopics presented in a number of articles and studies, carried out as part of the research into Czechoslovak victims of political persecutions in the Soviet Union, which started in 2000.¹⁴ In 2011, the outcome of the work was presented in a monograph containing biographies of almost 500 people shot in 1940 by members of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) in Katyń, Kharkov, Tver, Bykoven in Ukraine, and other places in the Soviet Union.¹⁵ Of particular importance was the founding role of Mečislav Borák in research into political persecution of Czechoslovak citizens in Soviet Russia and later in the Soviet Union between 1918 and 1956, in which historians from Opava and Prague were participating. Results have so far been published in several collections and monographs and dozens of studies.¹⁶ These issues show how Borák's work intertwines different topics and how different angles of view or new sources bring about more and more questions. The continuity becomes even more apparent in the latest of his

13 IDEM: *Vraždy v Katyňském lese* [Murders in the Katyń Forest]. Ostrava, Petit 1991; IDEM: *Symbol Katynia: Zaoziańskie ofiary obozów i więzień w ZSRR*. Czeski Cieszyn, Polski Związek Kulturalno Oświatowy, Zarząd Główny 1991.

14 See, for example, IDEM: *Katyn dans la mémoire des Tchéques et des Polonais de Silésie*. In: *La Nouvelle Alternative*, No. 32 (December 1993), pp. 28–31; IDEM: *Zločin v Katyni a jeho české a slovenské souvislosti* [The Katyń Crime and Its Czech and Slovak Context]. In: ŠESTÁK, Miroslav – VORÁČEK, Emil (ed.): *Evropa mezi Německem a Ruskem: Sborník prací k sedmdesátinám Jaroslava Valenty* [Europe between Germany and Russia: A Collection of Works Published on the Occasion of the 70th Birthday of Jaroslav Valenta]. Praha, Historický ústav Akademie věd České republiky 2000, pp. 505–522.

15 IDEM: *Ofiary Zbrodni Katyńskiej z obszaru byłej Czechosłowacji*. Opava, Slezské zemské muzeum 2011.

16 See, for example, IDEM: et al.: *Perzekuce občanů z území dnešní České republiky v SSSR* [Persecution of Citizens from the Territory of Today's Czech Republic in the USSR]. Praha, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky 2003, pp. 7–205; IDEM: *České stopy v Gulagu: Z výzkumu perzekuce Čechů a občanů ČSR v Sovětském svazu* [Czech Traces in the Gulag: From the Research on the Persecution of Czech and Czechoslovak Citizens in the Soviet Union]. Opava, Slezské zemské muzeum 2003 (2nd reworked edition); IDEM: *Formy i rozmiar represji wobec Czechów i mieszkańców ziem czeskich w Związku Radzieckim do 1956 r.: Stan badań*. In: ROGUT, Dariusz – ADAMCZYK, Arkadiusz (ed.): *Represje sowieckie wobec narodów Europy 1944–1956*. Żelów, Atena 2005, pp. 323–341; IDEM: (ed.): *Perzekuce československých občanů v Sovětském svazu (1918–1956)* [Persecution of Czechoslovak Citizens in the Soviet Union (1918–1956)], Part 1: *Vězni a popravení* [Prisoners and the Executed]; Part 2: *Váleční zajatci a internovaní* [Prisoners of War and Internees]. *Sborník studií* [Collection of Studies]. Opava, Slezské zemské muzeum – Slezská univerzita v Opavě 2007. IDEM: *Moskevská pohřebiště: Češi a českoslovenští občané popravení v Moskvě v letech 1922–1953* [Moscow Burial Sites: Czechs and Czechoslovak Citizens Executed in Moscow 1922–1953]. Opava, Slezská univerzita v Opavě, 2013; IDEM: *Zatajené popravy: Češi a českoslovenští občané popravení na sovětské Ukrajině. Z historie Velkého teroru na Volyni a v Podolí* [Secret Executions: Czechs and Czechoslovak Citizens Executed in Soviet Ukraine. From the History of the Great Terror in Volynia and Podolia]. Opava, Slezská univerzita v Opavě, 2014; IDEM: *Ruská literatura o politických represích. Z fondů Knihovny Slezského zemského muzea v Opavě* [Russian Literature on Political Repressions. From the Funds of the Library of the Silesian Land Museum in Opava]. Opava, Slezské zemské muzeum 2015.

research interests – the situation of the Polish minority and inter-ethnic relations in the context of historical and present Czechoslovak- or Czech-Polish relations.¹⁷

It must be noted that a substantial part of the abovementioned activities of Professor Borák has been associated with the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Cooperation started in the 1990s, when Professor Borák appeared at a number of conferences and other events organised by the institute in concern and devoted to topics such as the resistance movement and occupation, the Holocaust, or political repression. At the turn of the millennium, Borák was participating in a research project focusing on Jewish issues and anti-Semitism in retribution justice funded by the Grant Agency of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, the outcome of which consisted of two extensive collections of works.¹⁸ However, cooperation developed to the fullest only in the following decade, when Mečislav Borák worked as a researcher of the Institute's Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims. He played a major role in key activities of the Centre, including methodological and heuristic issues related to the search for and restitution of lost property,¹⁹ expert assistance, or presentation

17 See, for example, IDEM: *Očima Poláků: Historie a současnost československo-polských vztahů a polská menšina v Československu v zrcadle polského tisku na Těšínském Slezsku v letech 1989–1992: Komentovaná bibliografie* [Through Polish Eyes: The History and the Present of the Czechoslovak-Polish Relations and the Polish Minority in Czechoslovakia in the Mirror of Polish Press in Těšín Silesia 1989–1992. A Commented Bibliography]. Opava, Slezská univerzita v Opavě 2010. (Acta historica Universitatis Silesianae Opavien-sis – Supplementa, Vol. 9.)

18 IDEM: (ed.): *Poválečná justice a národní podoby antisemitismu: Postih provinění vůči Židům před soudy a komisemi ONV v českých zemích v letech 1945–1948 a v některých zemích střední Evropy. Sborník příspěvků* [Postwar Judiciary and National Forms of Anti-Semitism: Sanctions for Wrongdoing against Jews before the Retribution Courts and Commissions of the District People's Committee in the Czech Lands in 1945–1948 and in Some Countries of Central Europe. Collection of Contributions]. Praha – Opava, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky – Slezské zemské muzeum 2002; IDEM: (ed.): *Retribuce v ČSR a národní podoby antisemitismu: Židovská problematika a antisemitismus ve spisech mimořádných lidových soudů a trestních komisí ONV v letech 1945–1948. Sborník příspěvků* [Retributions in the Czechoslovak Republic and National Forms of Anti-Semitism: Jewish Issues and Anti-Semitism in the Files of People's Courts and Penal Commissions of National District Committees 1945–1948]. Praha – Opava, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky – Slezské zemské muzeum 2002.

19 See, for example, IDEM: *Verspätete Gerechtigkeit: Die Restitution von enteigneten Kulturgut in Tschechien*. In: *Osteuropa*, Vol. 56, No. 1–2 (2006), pp. 247–262; IDEM: *Některé možnosti muzejní identifikace předmětů patřících obětem holocaustu* [Some Possibilities of Museum Identification of Articles Belonging to Victims of the Holocaust]. In: IDEM: (ed.): *Ztracené dědictví: Příspěvky z "kulatých stolů" na téma dokumentace, identifikace a restituce kulturních statků obětí II. světové války* [Lost Heritage: Contributions from the "Round Tables" on the Documentation, Identification and Restitution of Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims]. Praha – Šenov u Ostravy, Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims – Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky – Tilia 2006, pp. 76–82; IDEM: *The Identification of Works of Art Belonging to Holocaust Victims and the Possibility of Restoring Them to Their Original*

of the results achieved by the Centre at conferences and other events, but mainly many collections of works he has been the editor of since the foundation of the Centre until now.²⁰ As a member of the Scientific Board of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2006, he also participated in resolving conceptual issues concerning the Institute's activities and future outlooks.

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Apart from 20 or so specialised publications and more than 150 studies and articles, Professor Borák's extensive research and creative activities also include participation in almost 40 research projects and tasks, study visits and internships in many countries, as well as extensive editorial, consulting and expert assistance activities, an organic part of which is also journalistic and popularisation work. He has published over 500 articles in newspapers and magazines, appeared in more than 100 television programmes and 70 radio programmes, familiarising the Czech and Polish public in an appealing way not only with the results of his research, historical events or tabooed topics, but also with experiences from historical expeditions and visits that spanned two decades and took place mostly in Central and Eastern Europe; however, one of them took him as far as Latin America.²¹ As a screenwriter and moderator, he prepared about 15 documentary films, among them *A Crime Named Katyń* of 2007, which won many awards at international film festivals, or *Secret Executions* released two years later, which dealt with the mentioned 500 Czech and Czechoslovak citizens executed in the Soviet Union

Owners (Using the Example of the Silesian Regional Museum). In: *Website of the Government of the Czech Republic* [online]. EU2009CZ: Holocaust Era Conference. Prague, June 26–30 2009, HEA Conference Proceedings, pp. 1–7 [cit. 2015-10-10]. Available at: http://www.holocausteraassets.eu/files/200000251-1b938a2d36/WG_LA_12.pdf.

- 20 Between 2005 and 2014, Borák was the editor of 15 publications; see, *inter alia*: BORÁK, Mečislav (ed.): *The Lost Heritage of Cultural Assets: The Documentation, Identification and Repatriation of the Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims*. Praha – Šenov u Ostravy, Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of the Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims – Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky – Tilia 2005; IDEM: (ed.): *“The West” Versus “the East” or the United Europe? The Different Conceptions of Provenance Research, Documentation and Identification of Looted Cultural Assets and the Possibilities of International Cooperation in Europe and Worldwide: Proceedings of an International Academic Conference Held in Poděbrady on 8–9 October 2013*. Praha, Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of the Cultural Assets of Second World War Victims 2014.
- 21 Let us mention at least the Great Valachian Expedition in the summer of 1995, during which he and his two companions crossed the Carpathians Mountains on foot, following a 1,600 km long route from the Banat on the Danube through Romania, Ukraine, Poland and Slovakia to the Moravian-Silesian Beskydy Mountains, to verify the migration theory on the origin of the Valachs, or the “DAY in Mexico” expedition, which started in the early spring of 1997, followed the footsteps of Czech exiles in Mexico and also established contacts with the local Czech minority.

at the time of the so-called “Great Terror.” Indeed, both of the documentaries enjoyed extraordinary reception.²² The public also knows him as the author of about 20 exhibitions and museum installations in the implementation of which he took part (e.g. museum installations in Havířov – Životice or in the Second World War Memorial in Ostrava – Hrabyně, or the “Katyń – Pamięć Narodu Polskiego/Katyń – Memory of the Polish Nation,” installed, *inter alia*, also in the Senate of the Polish Republic in Warsaw in May 2011). He has received more than 20 awards for his professional and publication activities both at home and from our northern neighbours, including the Golden Officer Cross of the Order of Merit of the Polish Republic, bestowed upon him in July 2001 by the Polish President.

The multifaceted and diverse activities of Mečislav Borák are amazing not only because of their scope, but especially because of their inter-dependency and continuity, which enable him to find new and unexpected connections. They are characterised by Borák’s never-ending search for historical truth, by uncovering the mechanisms of persecution and the long-forgotten fate of their victims, by attempts to bring to light their memories and thus return them to their families and descendants, by a search for the roots of current conflicts in historical memory, and the effort to solve them. Borák’s work combines erudition and deep knowledge of each topic or issue examined with the fervour of a reporter approaching the “crime scene,” and the ability to capture in special, engaging ways the results of the study of the past. In present Czech historiography, he is the founder of internationally renown research on persecution of the population of Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century, and an expert on the issue of compensation to their victims, a prominent expert on the Holocaust and the restitution of lost Jewish assets. At the same time, he is a tireless advocate and promoter of the discovered knowledge, aiming at its practical use, including their embedding in the legislation – an expert to whom people and organisations may turn for help and on whom they can truly rely. It is this “feedback” based on the thousands of hours of intense work which is not particularly visible that often prompts or provides a stimulus for further research. Let us believe that all of the above will continue in the same way in the years to come and that we may look forward to Borák’s future creative achievements and cooperation with him. For that, we would like to wish him good health, strength, and enthusiasm in the coming years.

The Czech version of this article, entitled Životní jubileum profesora Mečislava Boráka, was originally published in Soudobé dějiny, Vol. 22, No. 3–4 (2015), pp. 596–604.

22 The documentary film *Zločin jménem Katyň* [A Crime Named Katyń] was awarded the prize of the “Dějiny a současnost” magazine at the Academia Film Olomouc International Festival in 2007, the main prize Grand Prix 2007 at the 7th International Festival in Bar, Montenegro, and the annual prize of the Trilobit film presentation; in 2008, it won the main award “Visegrád Sign” at the 3rd Festival of Branch Studios of Public TVs of the Visegrád Four countries and was accepted at many international festivals and film presentations. The Centre of Documentary Production in Ostrava received an honorary commendation of the Czech Film and TV Association (FITES) for the *Secret Executions* documentary at the Trilobit Beroun 2009 film presentation.

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