

Success of the Congress of National Remembrance: Thousands of history enthusiasts in the New Technologies Zone

Congress of National Remembrance 2023 is behind us. The New Technologies Zone created by the IPN's New Technology Division, was visited by thousands of computer game and history enthusiasts

- both older and younger ones. Teachers, students and their parents, who participated in the attractions and activities prepared by the Division, agreed on one thing: this is exactly what history teaching is supposed to look like in the 21st century.

So what should it look like? What events took place in the New Technologies Zone at the PGE National Stadium in Warsaw? What could we learn about Poland's twentieth-century history, and in what form? Here is a brief summary of the Congress of National Remembrance.

Congress of National Remembrance - summary

As many as 24 debates and historical exhibitions, the International Film Festival on Totalitarianisms "*Echoes of Katyn*", the opportunity to play historical games in VR technology or take part in a programming marathon for the best students from all over Poland - all this and more took place at the PGE National Stadium in Warsaw from 13 to 15 April 2023 as part of the first national edition of the Congress of National Remembrance.

It was a one-of-a-kind event where different generations came together, united by their fascination with Polish history.

HISTHACK - a programming marathon for secondary school students

The IPN's New Technology Division is known for its participation in hackathons, i.e. programming marathons. This year, for the first time, it organised its own hackathon HISTHACK - a programming marathon for secondary school students from all over Poland. The aim of the event was not only to encourage students to learn about the past by means of attractive tools, but also to let them show, using particular examples, how they wish to learn about Poland's recent history.

This year's HISTHACK consisted of two stages. In the first stage of the competition, before the Congress began, the task of future programmers and game developers - who are still school students for the time being - was to prepare scripts for computer games relating to any event in Poland in the 20th century. In the second stage, on the first days of the Congress, the students

took on a new challenge - they had to prepare a complete historical education project using new technologies.

Professional VR headsets were awarded to the top three teams.

"Cyphers Game" and "Szybowcowa '87" - VR games in the New Technologies Zone

Participants of the Congress could not only watch the process of game creation, but also play the games previously developed by the New Technology Division, namely the iconic "Cyphers Game", which has already been completed by more than 300,000 people worldwide, and the recently premiered "Szybowcowa '87". Both were created by means of VR technology and enjoyed great popularity among the visitors of the New Technologies Zone.

"*Cyphers Game*" which entered the core curriculum as part of the Polish language classes by the decision of the Ministry of Education and Science tells the story of Polish-Soviet war. Players can break Bolshevik cyphers in real time and determine the course of the most important events of that period.

"Szybowcowa '87" is set during the times of Polish People's Republic (PRL), when oppositionists printed "blotting paper", i.e. the anti-communist publications of the Fighting Solidarity, hiding the printers in private flats for fear of potential raids by the Security Service officers. Players could take on the roles of active opposition activists and feel

the specific character of those times "on their own skin".

Latest trends and methods in immersive history teaching - a valuable expert panel

One of the 24 discussion panels on the 20th-century Polish history addressed the latest methods and trends in teaching about our country's past. Teachers, school principals and educators present at the Congress appreciated the substantive value and inspiration coming from the stage.

The discussion moderator, Marcin Wikło (editor of the "Sieci" weekly magazine) in a conversation with such experts as Magdalena Hajduk, Director of the IPN's New Technology Division, Monika Trocka (GovTech Centre), Andrzej Horoch, entrepreneur, Prof. Jan Pomorski (MCSU) and Krzysztof Zieliński, Director of the University Catholic High School in Tczew, discussed the key conclusions of the IPN's New Technology Division report entitled "*Immersive historical education - towards new educational paths*". They also drew attention to a number of potential challenges - both opportunities and threats - associated with the development of new technologies and social changes.

The first edition of the **Congress of National Remembrance** and the New Technologies Zone proved to be an outstanding success, determining the directions for educational development in Poland.