Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

My name is Reinhard Schreiner, I am coming from the archives of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung which preserve the records of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party of Konrad Adenauer, Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel. I am Vice-president of this Section. The subject given to me is “Parliamentary and Political Party Archives at the Dawn of Democracy – a Flashback to the Situation in Central Eastern Europe in the Mid-1990s”.

The fall of communism in 1989 dramatically affected archival institutions in Eastern Europe and Russia. Access improved considerably, and obstacles to publication of the documents found diminished.

This conference in Vilnius is not the first of the section SPP in Central and Eastern Europe. In the 1990s annual meetings of SPP took place in Prague, Budapest and Warsaw. SPP was created in 1992, three years after the fundamental change in Eastern Europe. Therefore, one of the first intentions of the Section was to come into contact with the archives of the newly founded democratic political parties and of the parliaments in Eastern Europe.

At that time, from 1990 on, I worked in the Section as assistant of the first President, Günter Buchstab, also coming from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. As preparations for the foundation of SPP, we collected information on the existing parliamentary and party archives in Europe. The
first meetings should deliver an overall view on the situation of these archives.

Twenty years later, in the Steering Committee of our Section – I think it was two years ago – we had the idea of organizing a conference dealing with the development of parliamentary and party archives in Eastern European democracies in the last twenty years to see what happened since our first conferences in the Mid-1990s. Thanks to our colleague Vida Kišüniené and the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, it was able to realize this conference here in Vilnius.

My short presentation can serve as a kind of general introduction to our big topic of tomorrow on the situations of the single parliamentary and party archives in Central and Eastern Europe. I am not specialised enough to analyse comprehensively this topic. I only refer to the experiences we gained from the connections and from the statements of our Eastern European colleagues at the conferences in Rome 1993 and Prague 1994.

Parliaments and their archives

The first annual meeting of the Section SPP took place in Rome in March 1993 dealing with the situation of the parliamentary archives in Europe.¹ Two main points were on the agenda: 1) Which materials should be collected? and 2) What are the conditions for access to the archives?

Unfortunately, there were only three participants coming from Central and Eastern Europe: Regina Škuropad from the Lithuanian Seimas archives, Wołjciech Kulisiewicz from the Polish Sejm archives; and Béla Pálmány from the Hungarian central archives of the National Assembly. In preparation of the conference we conducted a survey to more than 40 parliament-

ary archives regarding the kind of the records and the accessibility to them. As for Eastern and Central Europe, answers came from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania.

The result of this survey was that the Eastern European parliamentary archives were very similar – concerning the materials and the access – to those of Western Europe. The same material was collected (minutes of the plenary meetings, records of the commissions, audiovisual materials). The archives which gave their non-current records to the state archives were not only Lithuania (after 15 years), but also the Netherlands (after 50 years), Sweden (after 20 years) and Switzerland. The archives which acted in accordance with the State Law on Archives did not come only from Bulgaria and Lithuania, but also from Germany. The access dates were very different in Europe, the most frequent of 30 years applied to Germany, France, Poland and the Czech Republic. In all countries, the final decision on the access was taken by the direction of Parliament. The documents were available to parliamentarians, the staff of the parliament, researchers and journalists.

In the Rome conference, it was only marginally mentioned, how fundamental the change of 1989 was for the parliaments and their archives in the respect that they became independent and active. David M. Olson formulated it in 1997 as follows: “The parliaments of post-communist Central Europe have been propelled into intense activity from a previous condition of passivity. The change from a communist era of external party control to autonomous decision-making in a post-communist regime is not an easily accomplished transition.”

Kulisiewicz reported that, under the communist governments, the Parliament had been irrelevant, although it was considered officially as the most powerful institution of the state. „The archives did not work, the records were only preserved.” Confidential documents were not given to the par-

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2 David M. Olson in: International Political Science Review 1997, p.401
Parliamentary archives, they were controlled and protected by special services. The records were not described, the consequence was a considerable backlog in processing the material. In addition, even more documents had to be transferred to the archives due to the multiparty systems.

After the change, the „new” Parliament with multiparty system and the archives that had to be allocated often arised at the same time. Škuropad: „The Seimas began working on November 25, 1992, and therefore the place for the archives was still not clear.” However, the archives felt as independent organisation – And I cite Pálmány concerning Hungary: „The modern central archives in Parliament were established and began its activity only in 1991.”

The Eastern European archivists were come to Rome not only to talk about materials and access restrictions, but also to ask their Western European colleagues for advice regarding archive management and legislation. Regina Škuropad put it into these words: „The experience of other states in various fields of life is of great importance to our newly restored state. This conference and the issues which it concerns, as well as the experience of the parliamentary archives of the countries of Europe shall be a great support not only to our archives, but to the Lithuanian system of archives as well.”

The bad financial situation of many Eastern European countries posed a lot of problems which presented a serious obstacle in the creation of the material-technical basis of the archives.

**Political Parties and their archives**

The importance of party archives depends on their parties. In general, archives of bigger parties or of governing parties are more interesting for the most researchers than archives of smaller parties. When I helped to
prepare this conference and tried to find out the addresses of the Eastern European participants of the meetings of 1993 in Rome and 1994 in Prague, I had to detect that some or perhaps many of the newly founded democratic parties after 1989 had become irrelevant today, and that in some countries there even had been a kind of degression to a one-party system. Does that mean that the situation of the party archives in comparison to the situation 20 years ago has become worse or even hopeless? Tomorrow we will learn more about that. I am happy to see here and to meet after 17 years again László Varga (Hungary) and Bohumil Lukeš (Czech Republic), who already gave a lecture 1994 in Prague on this subject and who will do it again tomorrow.

Back to the situation twenty years ago and to the political parties existing at that time:

The communist parties of Eastern Europe before the change had a self-conception which was totally different from that of the Western European political parties. They subordinated themselves under the state and built up central party archives. These archives were practically inaccessible and were declared to a secret state affair. I am saying “practically” because our colleague László Varga had reported in Prague that the Archives of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party were accessible in a few cases, by very elected people after decision of a secret commission and in presence of a representative of the Central Committee of the party.

As you know, in 1989 communist parties gave up their monopoly on political power in East European countries and, under popular pressure, agreed to test their strength in free elections. As a result, scores of new political parties had sprung up in all East European countries. While many of these parties were very small and lack a proper organizational structure, others had quickly developed into major political forces.
In the first phase of the development of party systems, loose alliances of different opposition and popular movements came up, unified by the protest against the socialism of state. On the other side, the successors of the former state parties had big problems of legitimation.

For the first years after 1989, we can distinguish three different categories of political parties in Eastern Europe:

1. First, there are those who emerged from former opposition or popular movements such as Solidarity and Civic Forum.
2. Second, we have historically-grown traditional parties that already existed before the communist takeovers that were forbidden during the Soviet time and have re-emerged with the support of their old members.
3. Third, there are the post-communist parties which today frequently lean towards socialism and/or old-style communism.

From the parties now to the party archives:

The second annual conference of our Section in November 1994 – which I was allowed to organize - dealt with the general situation of party archives in Europe. Prague had been chosen for the reason that more archivists of Central and Eastern European countries should have the opportunity to attend the meeting. Consequently, we had participants coming from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and from Russia.

1) **Archives of popular movements and new parties**

Vilém Prečan, Director of the Institute for Contemporary History in Prague, gave a lecture on his Institute and on the archives of the Civic Forum. The Institute for Contemporary History was founded as independent research institute after decades of ideological manipulation. In 1991, the institute
could acquire and save the archives of the Civic Forum that was split in the „Democratic Citizen Party“ (ODS) and in the “Citizen Movement” (OH). The records document the formation of new political elites in Czechoslovakia, programmatic ideas in the phases of the revolution, discussions between single groups from them should develop new political parties.

Bélá Pálmany, Head of the Archives of the Hungarian National Assembly and co-founder of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), reported on his efforts to archive the foundation material of the MDF in private rooms. The MDF was the first large opposition movement in Hungary and, from 1990 on, a political party with a big central office and own archives.

Particularly, christian democratic parties were founded and built up archives. We had presentations of Ildikó Haraszti on the archives of the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement of Slovakia (MKDM), György Hölvényi on the archives of the Hungarian Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP), Katarina Latiková on the archives of the Christian Democratic Union (KDH) in Slovakia and Alexander Ogorodnikov on the archives of the Christian Democratic Union in Russia.

All these new parties had to build up their archives without own experiences. They found themselves in the difficult situation to employ educated archivists and to dispose appropriate stacks without financial support.

2) **Archives of traditional parties**

These were, above all, the social democratic parties; in Prague we had representatives from Slovakia (Pavel Hapák), Czech Republic (Zorka Hirošová) and Bulgaria (Assya Davidova). After the re-foundations, these archives tried to regain their former material which was rarely possible because it was lost or confiscated in 1948 by the Soviets or integrated in the archives of the communist state parties. Davidova told that the prohibition
of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party in 1948 was connected with the destruction of a large part of its archive documentation concerning half a century of history. One part of the archives had been kept in the archives of the Bulgarian Communist Party, another part in the Central State Historical archives.

The representatives of the archives of other traditional parties that were newly founded, were: Bohumil Lukeš ("The archives of the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak people’s party, KDU-ČSL"), Ferenc Virágh ("The Hungarian Small Enterpreneurs Independent Party"), Jaroslav Křižek ("The Archives of the Czech Liberal Social National Party, LSNS"), Ion Varlam ("The National Peasant Christian Democratic Party (NPCDP) in Romania"), and Swetlana Tomova/Roumen Iontchev ("The archives of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, BANU").

3) Archives of post-communist parties - What happened with the archives of the former communist parties?

The archives of the Hungarian Socialist Party and of the Bulgarian Socialist Party as so-called post-communist parties were represented in Prague.

Until 1989, these archives were the archives of the only party, the state party, and they were the richest archives in their countries. The documents were in charge of well-trained archivists and historians in scientific institutes like the Institute for History and Politics in Budapest or the Centre for Historical and Political Studies in Sofia.

The party documents between 1948 and 1989 in the so-called state party period were important and had to be protected because they included not only documents of the communist party but also from other parties, other organizations and public bodies. Thus, they represented the most valuable documentations of the society.
In the Prague Conference, Oleg Naumov from the Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Modern History gave a lecture on “The former communist party archives in the system of the Russian archival service”. Ten months later, Naumov also participated in the international conference “Archives of Former Communist Parties in Central and Eastern Europe” which was held from 28 September to 1 October 1995 at Stara Wieś in Poland. There, representatives came from twelve former East European central party archives: Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria. The results of the Conference at Stara Wieś had been published in a paper in 1997 by Leo van Rossum from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.\(^3\)

The two conferences from 1994 and 1995 confirmed that the communist archives in the Eastern European countries were transferred to state ownership and administration, but the processes were far from uniform. The transfer was sudden after the coup of 19 August 1991 in five member states of the former Soviet Union: Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Estonia, and Latvia. The transfer proceeded somewhat less abruptly but rapidly nonetheless in Slovenia and Romania. In the other countries, however, this transfer involved a process of negotiation and political struggle that lasted months or even years.

Rima Canacieva from the Archives of the Bulgarian Socialist Party admitted in Prague that the most complicated problem associated with the Bulgarian Communist Party archives proved to be the problem of their transfer to the state. The Law on the State Archive Fund did not have any provisions regulating either the property rights issue, or the safekeeping and utilisation of similar archives. Under these circumstances the BSP was quite justified to consider itself as their lawful proprietor.

\(^3\) Leo van Rossum: The Former Communist Party Archives in Eastern Europe and Russia. A Provisional Assessment. International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam 1997
Gábor Székely from the Archives of the Hungarian Socialist Party told that the Hungarian National Assembly had made a bill at the end of 1991 on the protection of the materials in the archives as the property of the Hungarian state and so they had gone into the Hungarian National Archive. However, László Varga clarified that the decision of the Parliament to nationalize the communist party records had caused serious discussions because nationalization could create the risk that the new state power could abuse its authority with these records.

As for the Russian federation, Naumov reported in Prague that the current records both in Moscow and in the province had been transferred in their entirety during the months August-December 1991. The integration of the former communist party archives of Russia in the state archival system was very important because it enabled access to sources which were necessary for interpretation of 70 years’ history of Soviet society. The integration process, long and complicated, took place in Russia for three years (1991-1994). The integration should cover the whole range of the usual work of former party archives: acquisition, registration, preservation, the use of documents. The 1994 report from Naumov showed that regarding the central and the provincial authorities, the former party archive staff stayed on in the new system.

The question if documents were destroyed, can not be answered precisely. In the conference of Stara Wies was said that “nearly all” the party archives remained intact, except for the ones from Poland, Lithuania, and to a lesser extent the Ukraine and Slovakia, which had been “purged”. The archives transferred during the political change (as in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Russia) were preserved in their entirety.

Only two points I would still like to touch:
- One of the main impediments was the backlog in processing the material that was transferred.
- The issue of the classified (secret) documents and the need for de-classification was probably the most substantial topic of discussion at Stara Wieś.

The participants from the conference at Stara Wieś agreed on the basic principles for integrating the former party archives in the national state archival structures:

- fully integrating the party archives in the state archival network,
- adapting registration and access to state guidelines,
- improving public access by increasing facilities in reading rooms and
- publishing finding aids and archival material.

**Conclusion:**

1. The fall of the communist state parties in 1989 with the introduction of multiparty systems had a serious impact on the parliamentary and party archives in Central and Eastern Europe. The documents suddenly became accessible.

2. The parliamentary archives became independent institutions. They had to process lots of materials from the new multiparty parliaments that only had been stored by then. The legal position of these archives – also of the party archives - was not clarified yet.

3. The situation of the party archives in the Mid-1990s appears much more complicated: huge archive materials of the no more existing communist parties, archives of the post-communist socialist parties, archives of popular movements and new democratic parties and archives of traditional parties.
4. After 1989, the communist archives were transferred to state ownership which caused protests in some Eastern European countries, like in Hungary (mistrust against the power of control of the State) and Bulgaria (where the legal position was not clarified). The communist archives were rich and well equipped, but they had been practically not accessible.

5. Very important records of opposition and popular movements - that contributed decisively to the change - could be saved by engaged people (Prečan; Pálmány). These movements often developed to new democratic political parties which made efforts to build up archives. The difficulties they had to face were: lack of financial means, of educated archivists and of appropriate stacks.

6. Traditional parties like social democratic parties which were prohibited during the Soviet time founded again their archives. However, the former archived material had often been lost and so they had to start from the beginning.

7. Archives of traditional and socialist/post-communist parties often were attached to institutes, designated as documentation centres for recent history. They resembled to the today’s modern archives of Western European political foundations or historical institutes we can find in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy.

For SPP, it would be very desirable to renew the cooperation we had in the 1990s with the Central and Eastern European parliamentary and party archives. I know that financial problems - also existing now in Western Europe - are the biggest hindrance. Let me say that it is beautiful to have found us again, after 20 years, here in Vilnius.
Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues, thank you for your attention!