

# Competition brief

Design of the permanent exhibition of the Museum of Totalitarianism in the former prison in Uherské Hradiště. The goal is to create a powerful space of memory that tells the story of oppression and democracy through human fates.

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Submission  
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### History of the Prison in Uherské Hradiště

The prison in Uherské Hradiště was built between 1892 and 1897 as part of a new judicial complex. In 1855, when the political administration and judiciary were re-organised, the court in the then regional capital of Uherské Hradiště became the investigative court for crimes and misdemeanours for the city and several surrounding districts. The original prison building on Františkánská Street soon proved inadequate, prompting plans for a new courthouse and prison outside the city walls. The neo-Renaissance complex was among the largest in the Czech lands, with a capacity of 240–300 inmates. It included the court building, prison wing, chapel, infirmary, and a garden providing economic benefit.

The prison was initially intended for common criminals, but already in 1920 it held the first political prisoners – participants of the so-called December Strike. These were still tried under the democratic principles of the First Republic, unlike the political prisoners of the Nazi occupation and later communist regime.

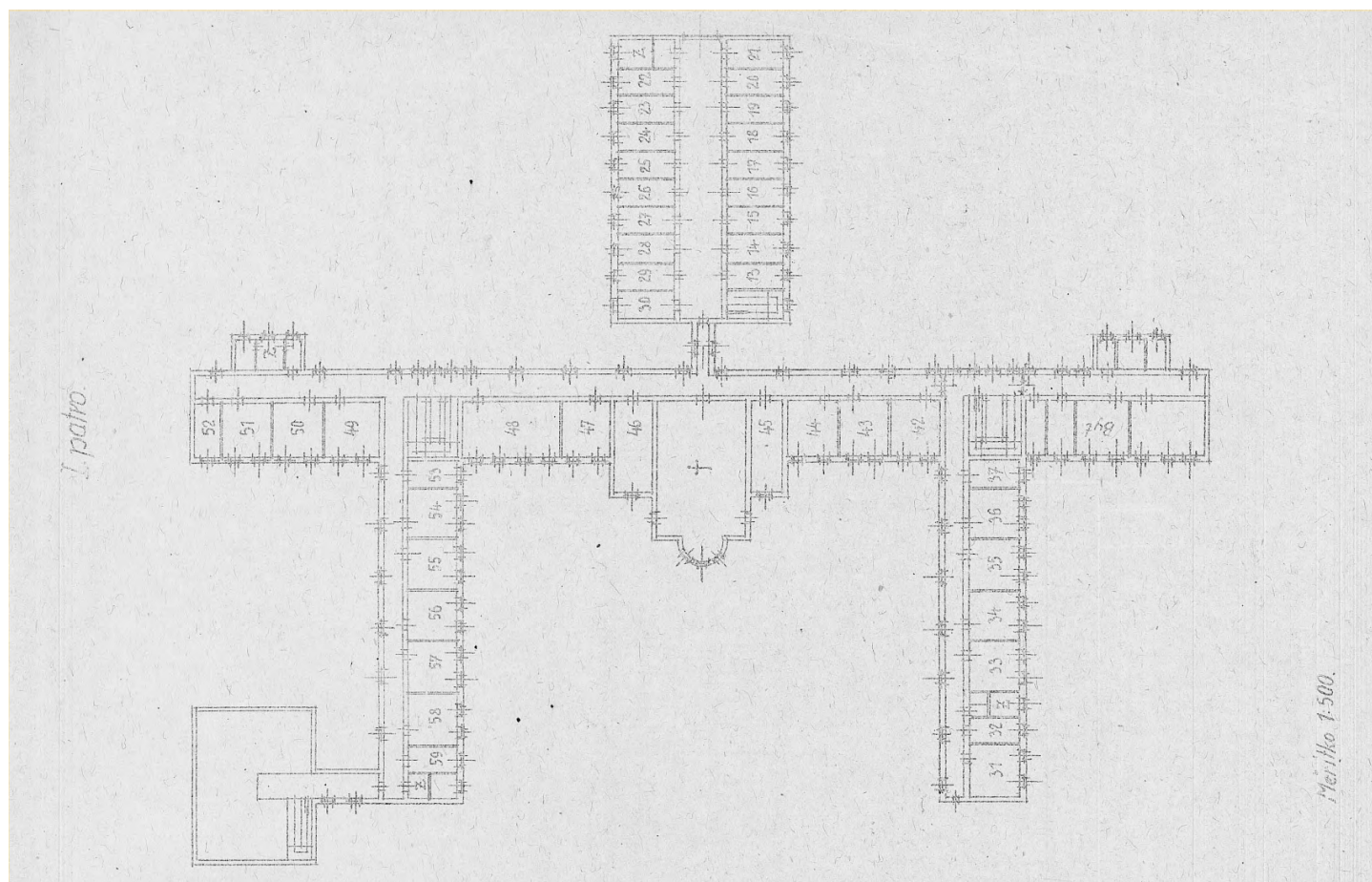
During the Nazi Protectorate, the prison was used by the Gestapo. Several thousand resistance members were detained here in pre-trial custody for anti-fascist activities during WWII. It was during this time that systematic physical abuse of prisoners began on a larger scale.

After the war, the prison held Nazi officials and those accused of collaboration. Dozens of them were later executed in the prison courtyard.

The darkest period came after the communist coup in February 1948. The building became the seat of the regional court and a site of brutal State Security interrogations. Investigators used methods of physical and psychological torture – the most infamous being the so-called induction device known as the “electric boots.” Prisoners were subjected to electric shocks, beatings, harsh conditions, and humiliation. Hundreds of regime opponents – real or alleged – passed through the prison. Many left with permanent injuries, others were sent straight to execution.

In 1960, the prison was officially closed and transferred to various institutions. Some parts remained in use by the justice system, others were taken over by the police and a secondary art school. Certain spaces became a makeshift after-school facility. Over the years, various reuse proposals appeared – such as converting cells into student housing or a service centre – but none came to fruition, and most of the building fell into disrepair. After the Velvet Revolution, the prison was declared a cultural monument and discussions about its meaningful future began. In the 1990s, the first initiatives emerged calling for its transformation into a memorial to the victims of totalitarian regimes. This idea gradually gained public and professional support. In 2016, a memorandum of cooperation between state and regional institutions was signed, outlining the site's future.

In 2022, the Office for Government Representation in Property Affairs launched an architectural competition for the reconstruction of the entire site and its new use by state institutions and the Museum of Totalitarianism. The winning design by studio OVA is now being developed into project documentation. The completed architectural study is included in the competition documents.



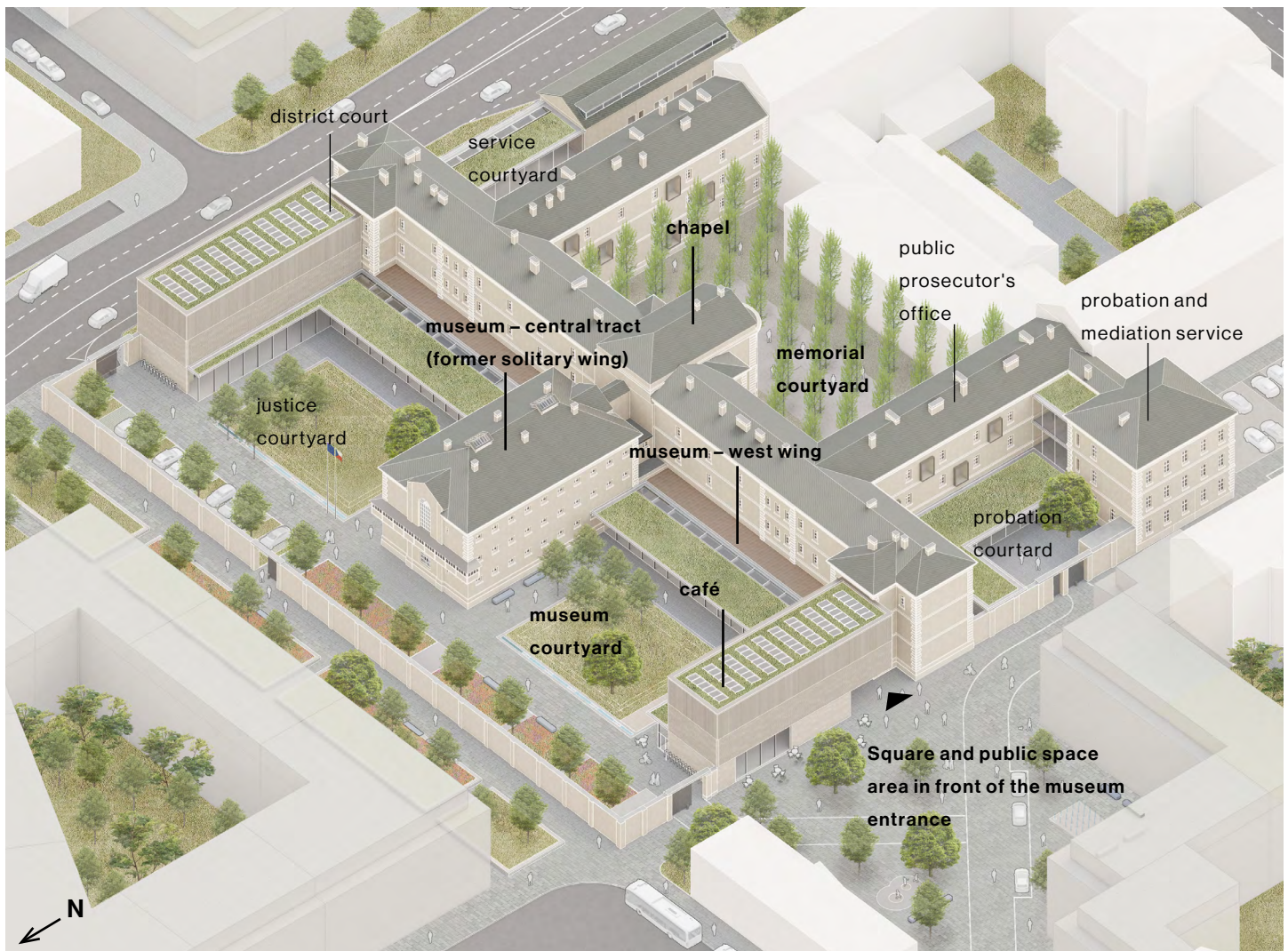
1925

### Study / Reconstruction project

The competition brief for the reconstruction included heritage restoration of the site, new use for state institutions (district court, public prosecutor's office, probation and mediation service), and the creation of the Museum of Totalitarianism. The winning design by studio OVA respects the historic composition of the building, introduces new elements, and opens the site to the public. The key architectural concept is that of a palace behind a wall. The complex is divided into several courtyards, each with a distinct function and varying degrees of public access..

Along the northern edge of the museum courtyard runs a water feature – an artificial channel with slow-flowing clear water. On the western side, a wooden terrace adjoins the café. A row of linden trees with perennial flower beds and an outdoor exhibition area lines the wall. The arrangement of exhibition panels was proposed by the architects; the exhibition design will later include a requirement for the graphic concept of the content presented here

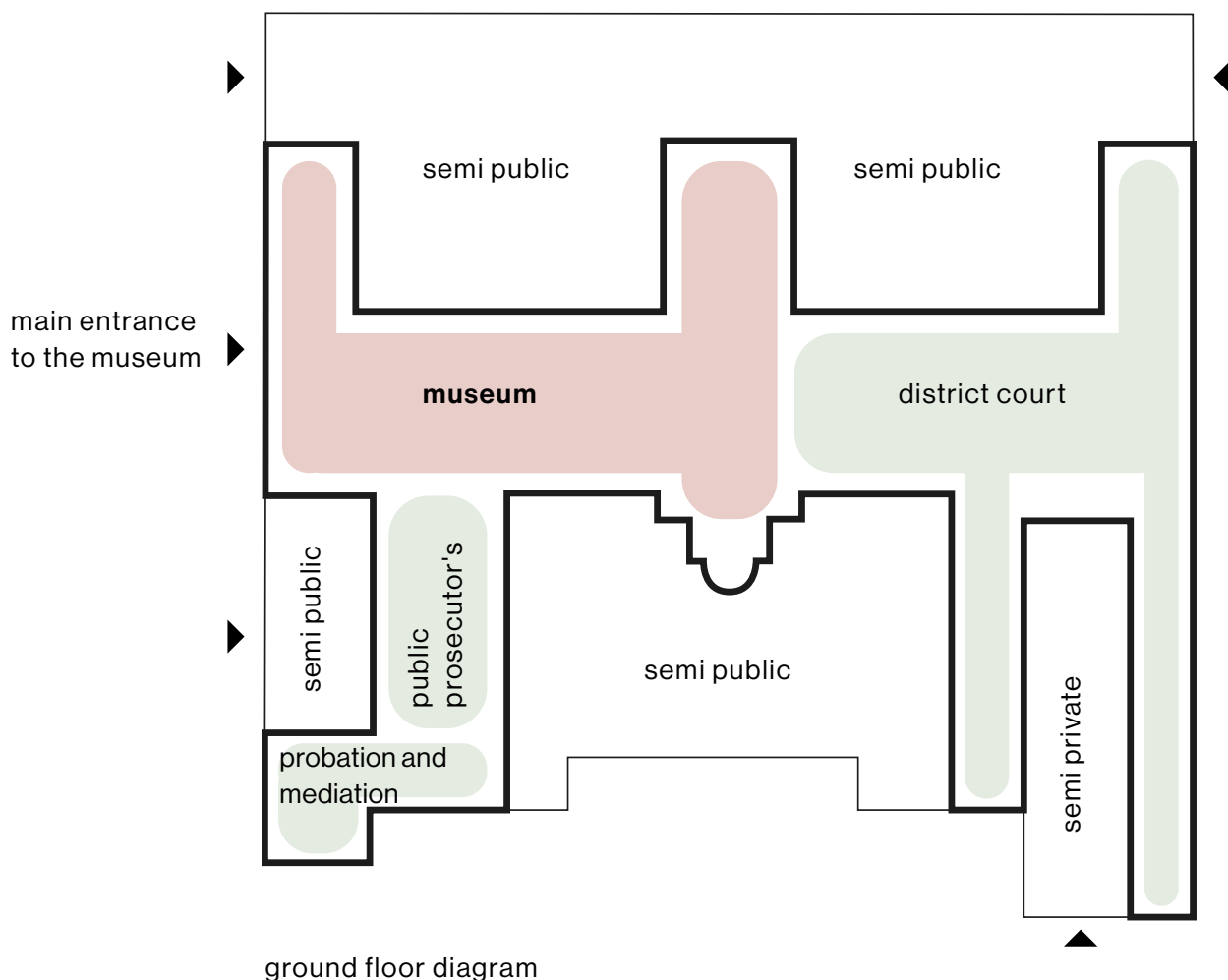
The museum exhibition also includes an inner memorial courtyard, dedicated to all victims of this place across various regimes. It offers visitors a space for reflection after taking in numerous impressions. This is an empty courtyard planted with columnar trees in a regular grid. At its centre, within a gravel surface, lies the former execution site. The courtyard will also be open to the general public. The design of the memorial itself is not part of this brief.

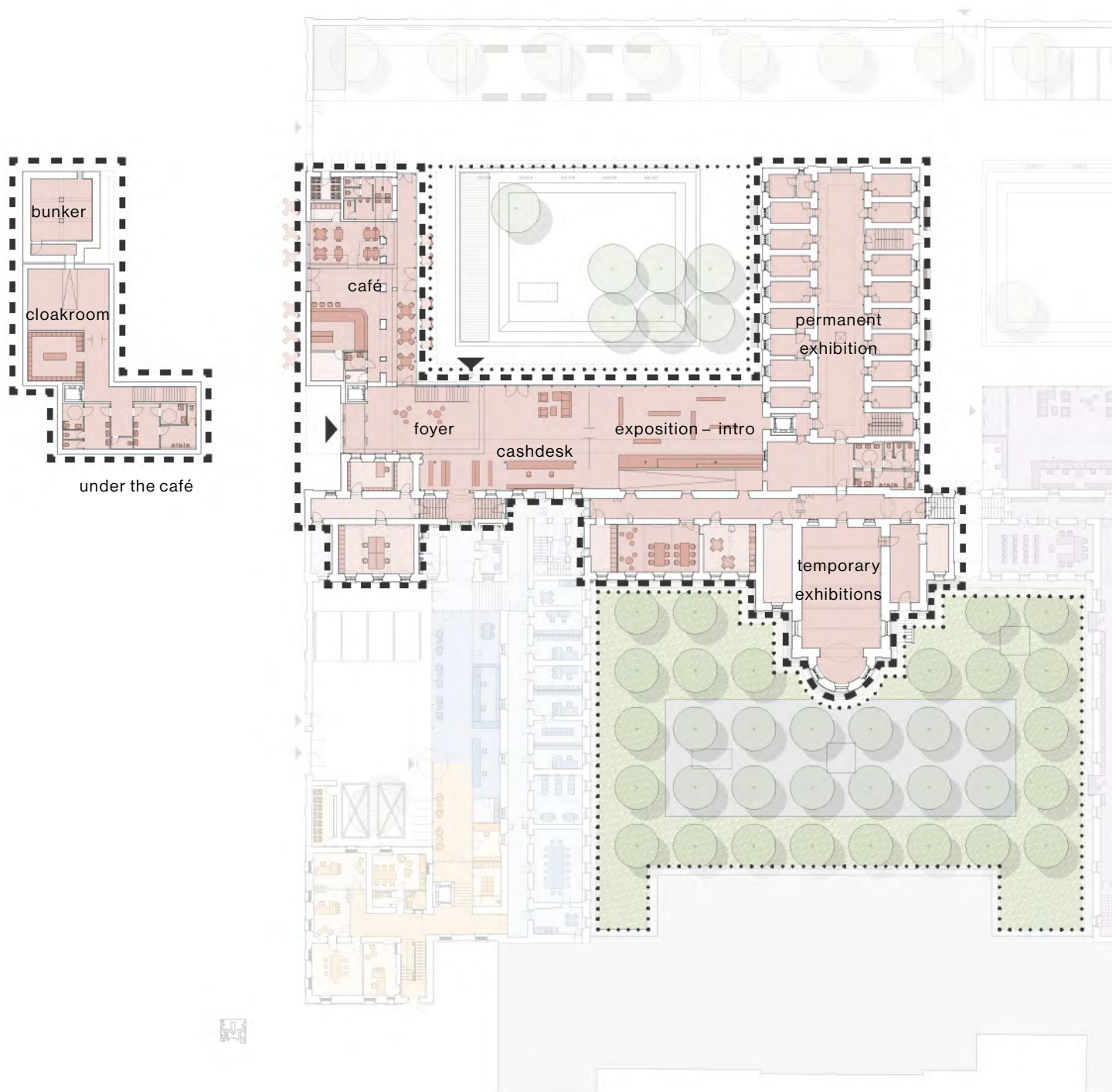


The museum's main exhibition will be located in the central tract (former solitary confinement wing), the opposite chapel wing, and part of the western wing on both ground and upper floors. The museum foyer adjoins a café, which is also accessible from outside and can operate independently of the museum's opening hours.

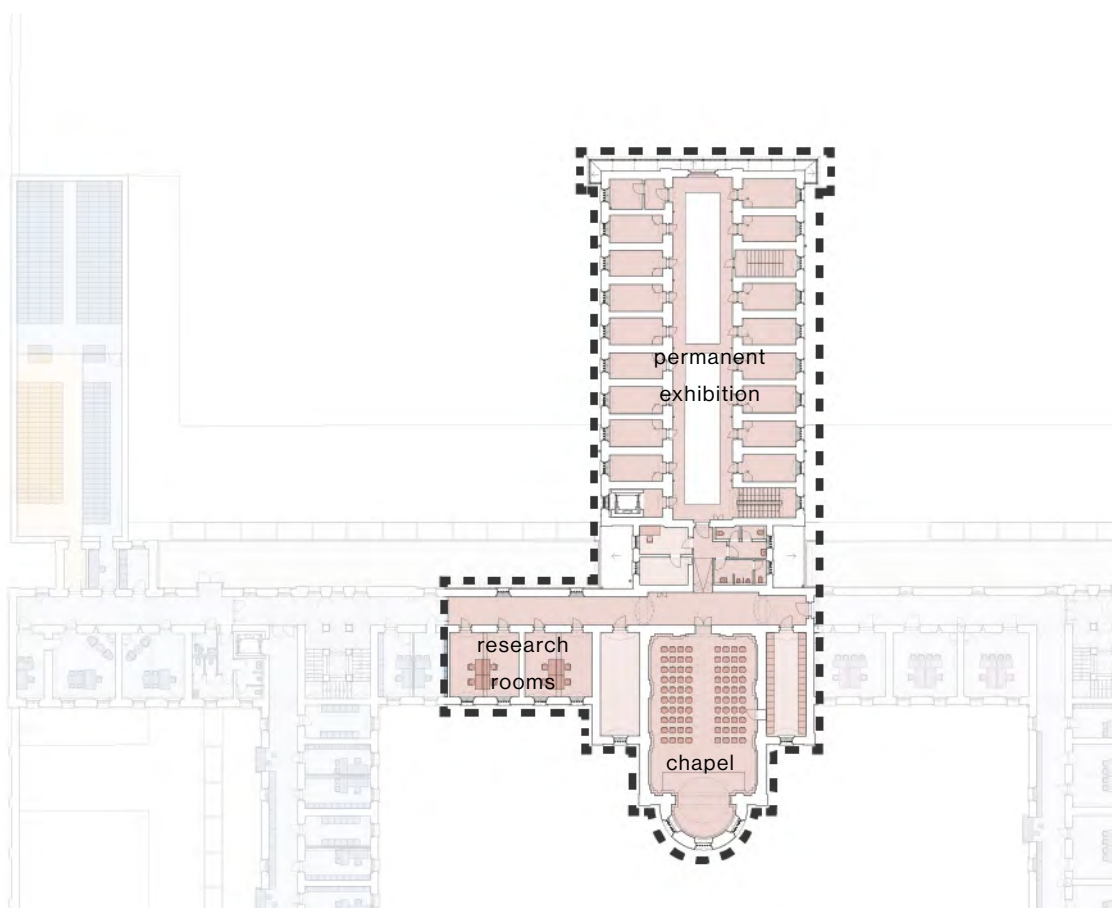
The district court is housed in the eastern wing, with offices occupying nearly the entire third floor (except the solitary tract, reserved for the museum). The public prosecutor's office and the probation and mediation service are located in the western wing on the ground and first floors, facing the same courtyard.

The reconstruction adds new volumes in keeping with the original layout of the site. At ground level, a glazed extension runs along the building, expanding the entrance area for all institutions (museum, court, prosecution and mediation services) and symbolically opening the building to the public and to civic oversight.





ground floor / basement floor



first floor



second floor

## Brief

The Memorial – Museum of Totalitarianism will be located in a former prison wing and will focus on the key historical periods of the site. The main exhibit is the building itself, which bears witness to the suffering of political prisoners under both Nazi and Communist regimes. The exhibition will document both totalitarian systems, their repressive mechanisms, and the fates of the victims. A central curatorial approach should be to convey personal stories, enabling visitors to understand the historical context through individual human experiences.

The subject of the competition is the design of a permanent exhibition within the interior of the building. The exhibition space comprises the central solitary confinement tract across all three floors and part of the western wing on the ground floor, with a total area of approximately 1,700 m<sup>2</sup>. Thematically, the exhibition should cover the period from the prison's establishment, through the Second World War and Communist persecution, to post-1989 reflection and the theme of justice.

The aim of the competition is to propose an exhibition that combines curatorial, technical, and graphic design into a coherent and thoughtful whole. The task is to develop an architectural and visual concept that defines not only the presentation and arrangement of exhibits, but also the way in which visitors move through and perceive the space. Emphasis is placed on the integration of visual aesthetics, technical detail, and spatial storytelling, offering a clear, impactful, and sensitive treatment of the site. The final outcome should be a unified composition that captivates visitors, guides them through the subject matter, and leaves a lasting impression, while also ensuring technical feasibility and functional quality. The exhibition should employ the latest museum and display technologies and combine a wide range of interpretive methods, including texts, videos, sound recordings, lighting design, artefacts, and the creation of an immersive atmosphere.



former solitary confinement wing

The exhibition concept has already been developed in a range of documents included in the competition brief. These materials, created by various authors, offer different perspectives on the exhibition's theme. While they may serve as a useful reference—especially in terms of content—they are not binding in terms of thematic structure or spatial layout.

The “Libreto”, prepared in 2021, outlines a preliminary narrative and curatorial philosophy, along with a detailed overview of topics and elements to be addressed in the exhibition. This is followed by the “Inventory and Overview of Three-Dimensional Exhibits”, which describes the objects to be included and worked with. The document “Basic Concept for the Exhibition in the Former Prison Building”, developed in 2022–2023, outlines the operational concept of the memorial and the broader curatorial and thematic framework.

The museum will also include an exterior exhibition area in front of the entrance and a memorial courtyard, designed to commemorate the fates of prisoners and offer a space for contemplation, reflection, and stillness. However, the outdoor sections of the exhibition are not part of the competition assignment.

The former chapel space on the second floor and the floor below it will serve as a venue for accompanying programmes—lectures, concerts, readings, commemorative events, educational activities—and temporary exhibitions. In addition, the museum will offer study rooms and a café. The design of these spaces forms part of the ongoing architectural documentation and is not within the scope of this competition. The goal is to create a vibrant cultural institution that not only preserves historical memory, but also fosters dialogue on democracy, freedom, and human rights. The vision of the exhibition is to convey a core message to visitors: the prison building stands as a living witness to a dark past and a storyteller of the transformations of freedom. The Museum of Totalitarianism is scheduled to open at the end of 2029.



visualisation of the reconstruction of the building, OVA

**Porota / Závslá část**



Jiří Mitáček  
CEO of the Moravian Museum



Ivo Popelka  
director of the Brno Regional Office,  
Office for Government Representation in  
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Marek Junek – alternate  
director of the Historical Museum –  
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Pavel Portl – alternate  
curator of the Slovákko Museum

**Porota / Nezávislá část**



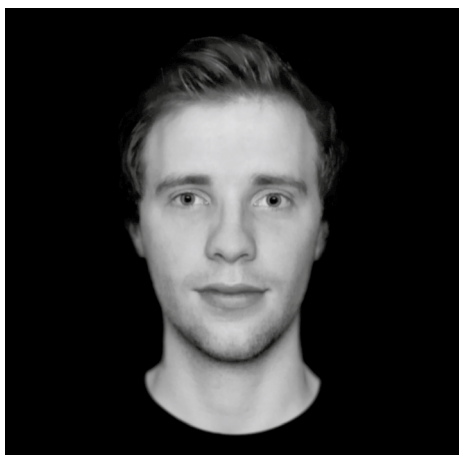
Helena Huber-Doudová  
curator of the architecture collection at the  
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