

**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC
WAR VETERANS AND WAR GRAVES DEPARTMENT**

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**WAR GRAVES AND COMMEMORATIVE SITES
CARE CONCEPT 2025–2029**

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PREAMBLE

The civil society began to cultivate its interest in war graves in the 19th century, when various civic associations seeking to care for war graves began to form. Before World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Army cared for military burial grounds and its chaplaincy service kept the records. Huge fatalities during World War I necessitated a more thorough war graves agenda. In 1915, the Austro-Hungarian War Ministry issued directives on the appearance of war graves and their registering, which was provided by the War Graves Section in the War Ministry. At the same time, a War Graves Inspectorate was established at every military command headquarters. In 1917, the war graves care agenda transferred to the newly formed War Losses Section. Upon the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the Ministry of National Defence instituted the Central War Graves Inspectorate in 1919, later renamed as the Central War Graves Administration, which kept the records and provided war graves care. During the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Military Files Administration Authority administered the agenda. Following World War II, the responsibility for upkeeping the war graves was vested with the Ministry of National Defence and then the Ministry of the Interior (1951–1999). Nowadays, the care is provided by the Ministry of Defence in accordance with the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., on War Graves and Commemorative Sites and on amendment of the Act No. 256/2001 Coll., on Undertaking and on amendment of some Acts, as subsequently amended (hereinafter “the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.”).

The mission of Governments, in the Czech Republic specifically through the Ministry of Defence (MoD), is to foster a consistent, effective, coordinated, coherent and meticulous support in the domain of care for war graves and commemorative sites. That purpose is served by both legislation and the War Graves and Commemorative Sites Care Concept 2025–29 (the Concept), developed by the MoD. The Concept is a strategic document focused on formulation and implementation of measures designed to strengthen support, development and sustainability of war graves care. The Concept represents an integrated framework for a coordinated and proactive approach to the preservation and restoration of war graves and commemorative sites. The Concept articulates strategic directions, specific steps and practical measures seeking to strengthen the care for these objects and simultaneously ensure a long-term care for them in the future. Through caring for war graves and commemorative sites, the MoD also seeks to preserve the historical memory and is actively involved in administering this portion of the national heritage within the following key activities:

- Creating optimal legal, specialist, economic and technological conditions;

- Support of war grave and commemorative site owners in their efforts aimed at upkeep and renovation of the value of these objects both in the Czech Republic and in foreign countries;
- Active role in installation of new war graves and commemorative sites including the provision of support to all involved parties and initiatives in this domain;
- Direction of media presentation of the care for war graves and coordination of public awareness in this context.

The basic means employed by the Government to attain its constant goals involve measures in the field of legislation and economy. An important milestone in the protection of war graves since the establishment of the independent Czech Republic was the promulgation of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. That Act defined the rights and responsibilities in the domain of care for war graves and commemorative sites and specified the remit of Government authorities in the subject matter. Despite the modern concept of the Act, which defines commemorative sites without earthly remains as war graves as one of a few worldwide, and thus permits official recognition of fallen persons especially in the course of World War I, it turns out the legal framework is becoming obsolete in some respects and does not cover the issue in a sufficiently comprehensive fashion.

The Concept assesses the development in tending war graves and commemorative sites in the previous years, analyses the current situation as a starting point for our future activities, sets the key policy pillars, addresses priority areas in the home and foreign agenda, and describes a set of specific measures to be adopted in the years ahead. Our intention is to enhance the existing care and create an optimal legal, economic, specialist and technological environment. The Concept is conceived as a tool for a systemic medium-term management with a specifically defined evaluation and updating cycle to preserve maximum effectiveness while creating an optimal legal and economic framework for proper management of this important area of the cultural and historical heritage.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that the present Concept represents the primary pillar of effective transformation including in terms of legislations, which will enable the performance of war graves care in the Czech Republic to highest international standards. We are committed to caring, registering, protecting, coordinating, providing grants, honouring and inspecting war graves, but we should also canvass the citizens to a deeper empathizing into this issue and embracing the longstanding tradition which our predecessors built and which we are seeking to

successfully continue. It is also our duty to contribute to its preservation by inducing an active engagement of the citizens into the existing initiatives that represent an evolution of the care for war graves. This path of critical significance leads through education and public awareness, which is not only passive but inspires a committed and active interest. It leads us to transforming the care of the places of final rest of national heroes and heroines into a shape that echoes the modern digital era while not losing the appropriate dignity and honour.

1. WAR GRAVES CARE IN 2005–2023

The following chapter introduces a comprehensive summary of the care for war graves in the Czech Republic and in foreign countries in 2005–2023 with specific emphasis on its regulation in the law. This timeframe provides a context for an evaluation of key events, strategic changes and technology innovations that affected the care for these important locations.

1.1 War graves care in the Czech Republic

The Act No. 122/2004 Coll. was passed on February 20, 2004, and come into force on July 1, 2004, defining the rights and liabilities in the domain of care for war graves and commemorative sites (hereinafter “the war graves”) and Government bodies and their authorised remit in the matters of war graves. The Act No. 122/2004 Coll. defines two primary categories of war graves: war graves holding buried human remains¹, and commemorative sites², which are structures without human remains designed to preserve and honour the memory of the fallen. Entities regulated by the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. are Government bodies³, and natural and legal persons, whose mandatory task is to provide war graves care or to be involved in the provision thereof. Those primarily involve the Ministry of Defence, regional governments, municipalities with extended powers, delegated municipalities, war grave owners and immovable property

¹ Section 2(1) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.: *For the purpose of this Act, a war grave is a location holding the remains of persons who died as a result of active participation in a military operation or war imprisonment, remains of persons who died as a result of participation in the resistance or military operation during wartime. A war grave can be a grave of an individual, mass grave or ossuary including the tombstone and other grave installations. A war grave is also a registered location holding the remains of persons who died in connection with a war event or another installation that is perceived to be a war grave in accordance with an international treaty binding for the Czech Republic.*

² Section 2(2) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.: *For the purpose of this Act, a war grave is also a commemorative site, such as memorial plaque, memorial or a similar symbol commemorating war events and victims who died as a result of active participation in a military operation or war or victims who died as a result of participation in the resistance or military operation during wartime.*

³ Section 4 of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.

owners, where war graves are situated. The Act No. 122/2004 Coll. has largely helped improve the public's awareness of the existence of the war graves, realisation of their historical importance as well as the improvement of the war graves' physical condition.

1.1.1 History of care for war graves in the Czech Republic

From its inception, the Czechoslovak state vested the responsibility for tending to war graves and their registering by the means of the Central War Graves Inspectorate (later renamed Central War Graves Administration) in the Ministry of National Defence⁴. In the middle of 1924, the Ministry of the Interior⁵ became involved in the system of war graves care and a part of the responsibility for the administration of war graves and keeping precise records in all cemeteries in their district was vested with gendarmerie stations in what was a one-off collaborative effort effective till the end of December 1924⁶. In 1924, the Ministry of National Defence prepared a bill on War Graves.⁷ The bill presented a definition of a war grave and determined the obligation to establish and maintain war graves to municipalities in whose territory victims of the World War were buried. The state was to provide a grant for the maintenance to the municipalities. War graves and their care were to be protected by the act until December 31, 1934, after which they could have been abolished, however, the bill was never enacted. Despite the cooperation of both Ministries, war graves were not fully protected and the proprietors of some municipal or ecclesiastical cemeteries abolished war graves once the legally mandate decomposition period was over without informing representatives of military administrations (gendarmerie stations or garrison commands) who would have maintained the graves⁸. In 1938, the Ministry of the Interior renewed cooperation in the field of war graves administration with gendarmerie stations becoming the executive authority of war graves care.

With the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Ministry of the Interior and more specifically the Military Documentation Office took over the administration and care of military war and peace graves, but this only included graves created before World War II. Graves of soldiers from Nazi Germany which were created in the territory of the Protectorate

⁴ Journal of the Ministry of National Defence, volume II., section 20, item 510 of 7 April 1919.

⁵ Journal of the Czechoslovak Gendarmerie No. 10 of 21 June 1924.

⁶ This obligation was later extended until further notice – Journal of the Czechoslovak Gendarmerie No. 3 of 25 February 1925.

⁷ Ministry of Defence, No. 4667/10 1924, in Prague on 22 August 1924, Proposal of Act on War Graves.

⁸ Land Authority circular No. 355.011/32 A-430 of 1929, in Prague on 18 July 1929.

were maintained by the occupation administration. After the end of World War II, war graves care was again briefly managed by the Ministry of National Defence, before it was handed over to the Ministry of the Interior in 1951 where it remained until 1999.

Since 1999, war graves care has been coordinated by the Minister of Defence in accordance with defined principles on the provision of grants for war graves care⁹. In 2001, the Act No. 256/2001 Coll., on Undertaking and on the amendment to certain Acts was adopted, including a provision¹⁰ according to which the abolishment of war graves considered to be war graves before the entry into effect of said Act can only be done after discussions with the Ministry of Defence and the right to use is granted free of charge and for an undetermined period. During the session on the proposal of the Act on Undertaking, the Legislative Council of the Government resolved that legal treatment of war graves should be governed by specific legislation in relation to international treaties binding for the Czech Republic. War graves care is currently governed by the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., which launched a new phase in the history of war graves care and redefined the related terminology. War graves care is further governed by Government Resolution No. 427 of 5 May 1999, on the provision of war graves care in the Czech Republic and abroad, and Government Resolution No. 1292 of 6 December 1999, on Principles for the provision and use of specific grants from the state budget for ensuring of care for war graves in the Czech Republic and monetary donations to foreign countries.

1.1.2 Significance of war graves care and its rules

War graves have, above all, a symbolic function. They commemorate service members who lost their lives fighting for their countries in various battlefields and fronts. Their existence reflects the society's approach to its own history and to heroes, who gave their lives in defence of the society. As a civilized country, the Czech Republic undertook¹¹ to maintain all war graves, regardless of whether they are graves of Czech or allied soldiers or graves of those who

⁹ Resolution of the Czech Government No. 1292 of 6 December 1999 on the Principles for the provision and use of specific grants from the state budget for ensuring of care for war graves in the Czech Republic and monetary donations to foreign countries.

¹⁰ Section 24(3) and Section 26(9) of the Act No. 256/2001 Coll., on Undertaking and on the amendment to certain Acts, as subsequently amended.

¹¹ On the multilateral level, this includes mainly international legal regulation in case of armed conflicts such as the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 on the protection of victims of war and Additional Protocols on the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I) of 8 June 1977. These documents define the obligations of states to respect and maintain war graves, enable repatriation of remains, provide access to the graves, mark them and register them. Similar obligations are also included in some bilateral international treaties.

fought against our country. The Ministry upholds and asserts the following fundamental principles:

- war graves are tended regardless of their origin or time of creation;
- all the fallen are victims of the horrors of war and therefore are not judged by nationality, uniform colour, nor conviction;
- the aim of war graves care is to maintain their dignified and recognisable state. War graves care in the Czech Republic is performed mainly by municipalities, which own the majority of war graves;
- the extent of war graves care is defined by law with an integral part of the care being maintenance and repairs¹²;
- war graves care is managed by their owner or, if the owner is not known, the owner of the immovable property on which the grave is located. The owner of a war grave is obliged to enable access for the purpose of paying respects or performance of works related to war graves care (especially if the war grave is located outside of burial grounds).

The percentual share of war grave owners:

War graves total – 39,830 (at June 1, 2024).

All the calculations below include installations marked in the Central War Graves Registry as “not a war grave”. This should not influence the percentual share of war grave owners.

War grave owners – percentage:

Prague Capital – 11.8 %

Statutory cities – 30.3 %

Towns – 19.0 %

Town districts – 1.5 %

Market towns – 1.1 %

Municipalities – 21.7 %

Regions – 0.3 %

¹² Section 2(5) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.: The maintenance and repair of a war grave means the marking of a war grave, placement of a memorial plaque, memorial or a similar symbol including the maintenance of the war grave, its surroundings and access path.

Municipalities, towns and regions own 85.7 % of all war graves (including installations marked as “not a war grave”).

1.1.3 Tasks of the state administration

Sections 4 and 5 (3) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. define tasks and authorised remit of competent municipal authorities, municipal authorities with extended powers, regional authorities and the Ministry as relevant state administration authorities.

1.1.3.1 The position of the Ministry of Defence in the war graves care system

The MoD is responsible for the coordination of war graves care. The interim organisation rule of the Ministry of Defence No. 130128-1/2003-7542 entrusted the coordination of care into the hands of the Department of External Cooperation, which was later renamed the War Veterans Department of the Ministry of Defence (MoD WVD) and, in 2023, War Veterans and War Graves Department of the Ministry of Defence (MoD WVGWGD). After abolishing the War Graves Section which was part of the External Cooperation Department, the number of designated employees decreased to four and later three, while the scope of work on war graves care remained the same and even increased due to new tasks relative to the inspection of delegated authority in the field of war graves care to regional authorities and municipal authorities with extended scope of power. After the reorganisation of MoD WVD on January 1, 2021, grants in general were managed by a different department and only two employees managed war graves care. The reorganisation on July 1, 2023, created the MoD WVGWGD with a Section for War Graves and Commemorative Sites with a total of nine employees, thus paving the way for a vital shift in war graves care management on the Ministry level.

1.1.3.2 Execution of state administration by the Ministry of Defence

The scope of execution of state administration by the MoD is defined by Section 4 of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., as follows:

- where there is doubt, decide whether an installation is or is not a war grave;
- coordinate war graves care in the Czech Republic and abroad;
- manage the Central War Graves Registry;
- provide grants in accordance with special legislation for war graves care to their owners, or, if the owner is not known, the owner of the property on which the grave is located;
- provide compensation for the limitations on the use of said immovable property and for the expenses for the purchase of said immovable property or its part.

1.1.4 Central War Graves Registry management

1.1.4.1 History of Central War Graves Registry management

The level and system of recordkeeping of war graves reflects the state and method of their maintenance described in the chapter 1.1.1 *History of care for war graves in the Czech Republic*. Physical record keeping was abandoned, as yearly updates would be unmanageable¹³. After ineffectual attempts to create an offline electronic registry using Microsoft Access, records of war graves have been kept since 2007 on all levels of state administration through the Central War Graves Registry¹⁴ (CWGR). This web application is accessible to authorized users online, does not require further installations to PC and provides immediate overview of the quantity, condition, appearance and location of war graves in the territory of the Czech Republic and abroad. The main advantage of this solution is the possibility to manage and develop the CWGR application through only one single server, as well as the possibility to use the gathered data for example for presentations to the public via a specialized website. In 2020, the CWGR app was divided into three autonomous sections according to individual administration levels. Changes made in the app on one level are only included into other levels once the new data is approved by a person with the appropriate level of authorization. The CWGR app has over 350 active users from municipal authorities and municipal authorities with extended powers, regional authorities, Regional Military Headquarters and other persons interested in the topic of war graves. The number of users can keep growing and the registry is updated and improved on daily basis¹⁵.

¹³ In case of physical record keeping, each grave would need a minimum of two A4 sheets (without photos), some war graves as many as 20. With 30 thousand war graves, the MoD would need to create a special registry facility or limit recordkeeping to simple information value only.

¹⁴ The CWGR application was created in early 2007 and is financed as a part of the Information System of Mobilisation Preparations, Operational Preparation of the State Territory module (General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces).

¹⁵ By end of March 2011, a total of 31,195 war graves were registered with close to 207,300 names of persons buried in commemorative sites in the Czech Republic and 2,345 war graves with 7,160 persons abroad. At November 6, 2014, a total of 34,185 war graves were registered in the Czech territory; 35,347 at December 3, 2015; 36,521 at May 9, 2018; 36,977 at July 10, 2019; and 37,142 at May 24, 2020. At January 1, 2024, a total of 37,997 war graves were registered.

1.1.4.2 Current state of Central War Graves Registry management

Records of war graves are kept on three levels¹⁶:

- municipal authority with extended powers manages the registry of all war graves which are located in its administrative territory;
- regional authority manages the aggregate registry of all war graves which are located in its administrative territory;
- the MoD manages the central registry of war graves.

The accuracy and completeness of data in the registry is mainly the responsibility of municipal authorities with extended powers, which are liable for the keeping of records on war graves in their administrative district and thus serve as the entry point for data and first level of register. The Act No. 122/2004 Coll. does not differentiate between individual types of record keeping based on content and data structure, so technical measures were applied to ensure that war graves registry data from all entry points is valid.

1.1.5 Inspection activities

Grants beneficiaries are inspected in accordance with Section 3 (1) (a-b) of the Act No. 320/2001 Coll., on Financial Control in Public Administration and on the amendment to certain Acts, as subsequently amended (Act on Financial Control). The results of inspection are recorded in an inspection report. Section employees inspect on applicants and beneficiaries during the preparation, implementation and evaluation phase. The MoD continuously inspects and evaluates the fulfilment of tasks defined by the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., as a responsibility of regional authorities through inspection of delegated authority. The MoD realises the inspection system into a three-year cycle. The inspection verifies the state and completeness of records on war graves in full, the form and results of war graves care coordination within the region and the inspection activity of regional authorities with an emphasis on the physical state of war graves.

1.1.6 Compensation for the limitations on the use of immovable property and for the expenses for the purchase of immovable property or its part

Since the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. became effective, the MoD did not register any requests for compensation for the limitations on the use of said immovable property, for the expenses for

¹⁶ Section 4(1-3) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.

the purchase of said immovable property or its part, nor any requests for the purchase of immovable property.

1.1.7 Other activity

Since February 1, 2010, the website [https://: valecnehroby.army.cz](https://valecnehroby.army.cz)¹⁷ contains basic services for the public, information on the topic of war graves, grants policy and CWGR data. In order to reward personal contribution to war graves care, the MoD created a Memorial Plaque awarded to legal and natural persons which have significantly contributed to the care, upkeep and renovation of war graves in the Czech Republic and abroad or shown significant activity in that respect. The recipients of the plaque are chosen by the Director MoD WVWGD based on well-founded proposals or at the Director's discretion. Between 2006 and December 31, 2023, the Director awarded a total of 711 plaques.

1.2 Care of Czech war graves abroad

Based on the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., the MoD also manages the care of Czech war graves abroad. The priority of care is mostly maintaining the graves in a dignified and recognisable state. The care of Czech war graves abroad is managed through cooperation with Czech diplomatic missions, Defence Attachés' Offices (DAOs), local authorities and provision of financial donations in accordance with the Act No. 89/2012 Coll., of the Civil Code, as amended and the Government Resolution No. 1292 of 6 December 1999 on the Principles for the provision and use of specific grants from the state budget for ensuring of care for war graves in the Czech Republic and monetary donations to foreign countries for the implementation, maintenance and renewal of commemorative sites. Cooperation with Czech diplomatic missions is detailed in Chapter 4, *Complex care of war graves: vision and strategy*, while the provision of financial donations is described in Chapter 5, *Financing*. Czech legislation and international treaties which regulate war graves care are detailed in Chapter 4, *Complex care of war graves: vision and strategy*.

1.2.1 Principles of care and categorization of Czech war graves abroad

The MoD honours the principle that each fallen or missing Czech or Czechoslovak soldier who comes from the territory of today's Czech Republic is to have a war grave abroad commemorating his name. Furthermore, in accordance with the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., all

¹⁷ In 2025, the address changes to [https://:valecnehroby.mo.gov.cz](https://valecnehroby.mo.gov.cz).

fallen service members are perceived as victims of war and are not to be judged by nationality, conviction or rank and all war graves are taken care of, regardless of when they were created. In coordination of war graves care, the Ministry always accentuates a detail which is specific for the Czech Act No. 122/2004 Coll., which defines as war graves even commemorative sites of victims of war and equates them to graves holding human remains. It is necessary to emphasize that such commemorative sites are not governed by international treaties, which increases both the volume and variety of Czech war graves care.

The care of Czech war graves abroad was a focus of the employees of the War Graves Section under the External Cooperation Department, which later became the WGD MoD, since 2005. In accordance with Section 2 (3) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., which imposes the obligation to keep records of war graves, the employees defined seven main categories divided by individual historical events as follows:

- graves originating in wars before World War I – the oldest recorded grave is the commemorative site of king Ottokar II of Bohemia near Dürnkrut, Austria (1278);
- graves of Austro-Hungarian service members from the territory of the now Czech Republic fallen in World War I (1914–1918);
- graves of Czechoslovak legionnaires (1914–1920);
- graves of Czechoslovak service members fallen or missing in combat against Hungarians and Hungarian Bolsheviks (1918–1919);
- graves of members of the Czechoslovak armed corps fallen or missing defending the state border (1938–1939);
- graves of Czechoslovak service members fallen or missing in World War II (1939–1945);
- graves of fallen members of peacekeeping missions (1994–2020).

1.2.2 Trends and standards in the care of Czech war graves abroad in 2005–2023¹⁸

All data gained through archive research, own research during trips abroad or information provided by private entities and non-governmental organisations – mostly the Czechoslovak Legionnaires Association – were entered into the CWGR in cooperation with DAOs. As of January 1, 2024, the CWGR application contained data and photos of Czech war graves located in a total of 49 countries and 4 continents which amount to 3 666 graves with a total of 17 545 victims.

The gathering of data for the registry produced the standards for individual fields of interest for the fulfilment of legally defined war graves care, international treaties and memorial diplomacy. By applying quantitative standards – the number of Czech war graves in the territory of a specific state – we mainly focused on France, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom in 2005 – 2023. Based on individual discussions on cooperation with respective war graves care authorities from the above-mentioned countries, the priority was set on Poland, Russia Slovakia and Ukraine.

The quantitative aspect was linked to the historical debt to Czechoslovak legionnaires who fought and fell in the western and eastern fronts of World War I. We focused on negotiations which led to the implementation or restauration of memorials dedicated to them in Belarus, Canada, China, France, Italy, Japan, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine and, to a certain extent, Hungary. We also accentuated a parallel trend to pay homage to Austro-Hungarian soldiers who fought in World War I. In the monitored period, our building and restauration initiatives were successful especially in Romania, Serbia and Slovenia. Since the creation of a separate War Graves and Commemorative Sites Section in July of 2023, this trend has been becoming increasingly significant. We are actively prioritizing, and we integrate into our work the long-omitted diplomatic aspect, which is a foundational pillar of our current activity, as described in Chapter 4, *Complex care of war graves: vision and strategy*.

The trends in the care of World War II graves can be described as ambivalent. On one hand, we received with deep gratitude the care of Czech war graves abroad, especially from the hands of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, which we supported with purpose-specific financial donations, on the other hand,

¹⁸ The dating 2023 means until the creation of the War Graves and Commemorative Sites Section on 1 July 2023. Furthermore, partial implementation, installation and restauration projects finalized after 1 July 2023 have entered the preparatory phase before that date.

we had to deal with unsuccessful or unsatisfying negotiations with the German, Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian side, caused by circumstances outside of our control. In this field, we are aiming to attain a qualitative change.

The fourth historic trend – the care and maintenance of graves of Czech service members who died in foreign operation – has so far been implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo. The summary of our activities in 2005 – 2023 as well as an outlook regarding the care of Czech war graves abroad can be found in Chapter 4, *Complex care of war graves: vision and strategy*.

2. SWOT ANALYSIS

Identification of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats performed through the SWOT analysis showed valuable findings which provided directions for strategic planning and decision-making.

2.1 Strengths

- 1. Creation of a dedicated War Graves and Commemorative Sites Section.** The creation of a dedicated War Graves and Commemorative Sites Section (the Section) presents a unique opportunity to create a complex concept of war graves and commemorative sites care. We define the concept of war graves care, which works in developed western countries and continues the tradition of the First Republic, when war graves care was at a high level.
- 2. Current political support of war graves and commemorative sites care policy.** We fulfil point 8 of the *Ten priorities for Defence: Veterans and Traditions* focused on the development of the care of war graves and commemorative sites abroad. Such activity includes honouring the memory of victims of wars regardless of their nationality and religion. Our objective is to create a war graves care system, which corresponds to the standards of war graves in the Transatlantic civilization.
- 3. Specifics of the Czech legislation.** The definition of a commemorative site as a war grave in accordance with Act No. 122/2004 Coll., allows us to record and officially commemorate persons who died in World War I. These specifics are not included in other countries' legislation, of course if the country even has legislation dedicated to war graves care.

4. **WGCS as one of main representatives of Czech memorial diplomacy.** We record and renew war graves of service members born in the territory of the now Czech Republic who died and were buried abroad. Damaged war graves are being reconstructed and commemorative sites are being renewed. Through memorial diplomacy, we cooperate with foreign partners, and we organize ceremonial reveals of renewed or new commemorative sites with the participation of both Czech and host nation representatives.
5. **Central War Graves Registry (CWGR application).** We are working on improving the current public portal which will be more user-friendly to the public. The aim is to interconnect the CWGR application with the Database of the Fallen and scanned documents of the Digital repository of the Czech MoD.
6. **Management of methodology for local administration authorities.** We have prepared a methodology for coordinators of war graves care: *The care of war graves. Guide of the Act on war graves care principles. Basic terminology.* The WVGWD organizes methodological seminars and continuously seeks inclusion of local administration in the management of the CWGR and completion of historical data.
7. **Ministry-level inspection of delegated power of war graves care in regions.** The fulfilling of tasks which were transferred to regional offices in accordance with the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., is subject to continuous monitoring and evaluation by the MoD. The evaluation is performed in the form of transferred power once every three years at individual regional offices. During each inspection, most effort is dedicated to the evaluation of the physical condition of a selected sample of all war graves in the region.
8. **Recognition of coordinators and other persons for war graves care in the Czech Republic and abroad.** In January 2006, the Ministry introduced the War Graves Care Plaque to appreciate significant personal contribution to war graves care. The plaque is awarded to legal and natural persons who significantly contributed to the care, maintenance and repair of war graves in the Czech Republic and abroad or engaged significantly in the field of war graves care. In 2006 – 2023, a total of 711 plaques were awarded (561 Czech Republic, 150 abroad).
9. **Grants and financial donations abroad.** We continue providing grants for war graves care in the territory of the Czech Republic within the program 107290 – Preservation and restoration of historical values I, Czech Republic, through which the MoD regularly

published a call for grants application for war graves care. The grant is intended for purposeful maintenance of war graves and commemorative sites and their dignified state or their construction and the maintenance of the memory of service members and other persons who died in combat or because of active participation in a war.

10. Cooperation with the Investigative Service of the Czech Red Cross (CRC). The Memorandum on Cooperation between the MoD and the Czech Red Cross focuses on cooperation (international humanitarian law, preparation of citizens for defence of the state, medical services etc.) including war veterans and war graves care which emphasizes the support of war veterans, strengthening of national pride and maintenance of military tradition. Key points also include the participation of war veterans in CRC activities, provision of social care through local CRC communities and cooperation in searching for war graves through the Investigative Service of the CRC. The WWWGS is responsible for the cooperation within the MoD.

2.2 Weaknesses

1. **Insufficient staffing of the Section.** In the past, the care of war graves and commemorative sites was insufficient as all key activities were only provided by three MoD employees. Since July 1, 2023, a new section was created with nine, now ten employees, who specialize in war graves care in the Czech Republic and abroad and in the provision of grants. Our activity also includes external experts from numerous fields.
2. **Legislation does not keep up with current trends.** The current form of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. does not deal with the following war graves care topics which, according to current international trends, should be codified. These topics include for example:
 - War graves of service members who died in foreign missions. The Act No. 122/2004 Coll. does not explicitly define war graves holding remains of and commemorative sites dedicated to victims of modern foreign missions with regard to the rights of the victims' families (due to limitations linked to the use of a war grave);
 - Clarification of the category victim of persecution for religious, political and racial reasons in accordance with the Geneva Conventions;
 - Inclusions of victims of air strikes during the war, death marches, expulsion of Germans after 1945 and occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 into war graves care;

- Inclusion of spaces and memorials linked to our military history which do not fulfil the definition of a war grave but their construction or repairs can be financed through newly created items;
- Specification of rights and obligations of owners of war graves and inclusion of a new category, lessee of war grave which is not yet included in the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., which are usually the so-called family war graves.

We intend to interconnect the amendment of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., on War Graves with the Act No. 170/2002 Coll., on War Veterans, as amended, which focuses on current topics linked to war veterans.

3. **International treaties.** Insufficient international cooperation which is caused by a low number of bilateral agreements on war graves care. Furthermore, concluded agreements are not being upheld. We intend to follow up on cooperation with international institutions which focus on war graves care. We shall perform a revision of existing intergovernmental agreements and take steps to forge them with Austria, Germany, Hungary and Italy.
4. **Low number of digitalized documents in the Database of the Fallen.** The input of digitized data into the Database of the Fallen is insufficient, which impacts the functionality of the database. We are working on the development of the CWGR application and its integration with the Database of the Fallen and Digital repository. In August of 2023, we successfully integrated the CWGR and the Database of the Fallen. In the upcoming period, we will cooperate with experts to complete missing information into both databases.
5. **Insufficient public relations.** So far, popularisation of war graves care has not received sufficient attention within the awareness campaign led by the MoD. As a result, the public has little awareness of the topic. Well organized PR campaigns can provide the much-needed exposition and trustworthiness to the Section to fulfil its tasks. Public relations are perceived as an integral part of our strategy, and we apply it actively in our processes. We thus fulfil the requirements of a modern society for a complex level of information on our projects and activity.
6. **Gaps in cooperation with local administration authorities and Defence Attachés.** So far, the cooperation with local administration authorities has not been used to its full potential and the same applies to Defence Attachés abroad. This mainly includes

communication and training from the side of the WVGGS. The cooperation includes increasing the competencies of representatives of local administrations and participation in orderly recordkeeping within the CWGR application. During 2024, the Section's employees participated in educational activities focused on coordinators of war graves care in selected regions and municipalities with extended powers. We will cooperate on projects with regional partners and strengthen cooperation with Defence Attachés and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the field of the care of Czech war graves abroad.

7. **Change of paradigm of cooperation with public service media.** Due to insufficient popularization of the topic of war graves, media did not show appropriate interest in mutual cooperation. We actively strive for a regular form of cooperation with the public service media such as Czech TV, Czech Radio and the Czech Press Office. These media platforms will regularly inform the general public of our activities in the field of war graves and commemorative sites care. In this aspect, we draw inspiration from the Ministry of Culture and their efforts to publicize the topic of national heritage care.
8. **No publication activities.** We will cooperate with the Military History Institute Prague within the preparation and publication of a printed series on significant war grave sites and commemorative sites. The first project takes the form of a publication on commemorative sites in Chişinău, Moldova.

2.3 Opportunities

1. **Attracting, developing and keeping high-quality personnel within the Section and for external cooperation.** We want to become an employer who upholds values and, at the same time, follows and adapts to innovations and new working methods which lead to one common goal; to inspire, include and strengthen our workforce, while increasing the number of employees by at least five. The increase of structural posts will be done within the WVGGS. Financial funds shall be used for the acquisition of external collaborators. In order to cover the key project of archive research, we shall search for talented individuals among students of history, archival science and auxiliary science of history.
2. **Development of memorial diplomacy.** We are optimising and extending war graves care abroad. We are searching for forgotten graves and commemorative sites to

strengthen memorial diplomacy and prepare materials for new international treaties. We are preparing optimisation of financing of war graves repairs, and we intend to extend our projects to so-far omitted locations abroad.

- 3. Increasing the public's interest in war graves and memorial sites care at home and abroad.** We are strengthening our promotion activity to approach a varied group of respondents. We participate in expert activities and focus on the creation of projects on social platforms which help spread information of war graves care. Our intention is to increase awareness of the topic of a broad spectrum of persons, including especially the younger generation.
- 4. Development of memory tourism in the Czech Republic and abroad.** We focus on the development of projects of memory tourism, both at home and abroad. We shall support initiatives that help the public discover historical locations linked to war events and commemorative sites, strengthening thus their understanding of the past. We are also preparing a cooperation with the CzechTourism agency on international projects linked to the topic of war graves care in which we wish to participate alongside the public.
- 5. Optimisation of websites and active advertising of our work to share the stories of war graves.** One of our priorities is to participate in sharing the stories of war graves with a varied audience. We aim at creating a digital platform, that will enable to share, educate, inform and inspire the younger generation. We are working on improving the CWGR so that it is user friendly and includes a mobile application. We prepared and are developing a new version of our current website and we are active on social network platforms.
- 6. Sources.** While we assess that unrecorded war graves, especially from World War I, amount to dozens of thousands and their exact number is unknown, many opportunities arise for archive research and international cooperation with war graves care institutions.
- 7. Variety of topics.** We focus on our key projects such as archive research using unprocessed resources of the Central military archive – Historical military archive which contains documents of the War Graves Cadastre in the Czech Republic and abroad. This information helps us complete and precise our database, record new war graves and initiate reconstruction and renewal of existing war graves. Research is

already underway. We will also focus on topics which have so far been omitted or marginalized, including our debt to soldiers originating in the now Czech Republic who served in the Austro-Hungarian Army. We also focus on the occupation of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968, Czech soldiers in the Prussian-Danish war of 1864, American Civil War in the 19th century, Vietnam War in the 20th century and others.

8. **Organising conferences and similar events with international participation of war graves care authorities.** We are considering organising conferences within which the section can become the initiator and best practice discussion moderator. Conferences and other similar events can serve to share and exchange experience among institutions of war graves care from the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.
9. **Initiate regular publishing of information in media.** Thanks to regular cooperation with public service media such as the Czech TV, Czech Radio and the Czech Press Office, as well as other media including social platform profiles which we have created and administrated, our aim is to inform the public of our activity in the field of care of war graves and commemorative sites. Such cooperation allows us to provide topical updates, for example in situations linked to combat or wars and formulate clear procedures regarding war graves care in the name of the MoD.

2.4 Threats

1. **Negative narrative in a part of the public space** – *“And so the non-veteran prefers to dig up 80 year old graves rather than care about those, who are alive; the dead do not care, they are dead and simply being remembered by your loved ones is enough.”* – quote from a Facebook comment to the Ministers’ conference on Changes to war veterans and war graves care of October 10, 2023. The negative image in the public spaces unfortunately has backing in the rhetoric of some Czech political actors who use the topic to gain political points without showing any understanding of the basic context. It is vital to be aware that history influences the present. It is our duty to keep explaining that war graves care is a topic for all of us and it is part of our cultural identity.

2. **Possible shift of priorities of the political representation.**
3. **Wars and instability in areas with significant numbers of Czech war graves.**
4. **Insufficient, interrupted or non-existing cooperation with countries such as the Russian Federation.**
5. **Insufficient expertise of employees.** This includes mainly language and computer skills. Currently, educational activities do not include systematic professional development, although we do emphasise the priority of language skills.
6. **Risk of irreversible loss of unrecorded war graves.** Given that not all war graves in the Czech Republic and abroad have been recorded, there is a risk that unregistered graves could be lost. This emphasizes the need to maintain our historical monuments as a part of our cultural identity and to avoid ignorance and insufficient awareness of historical values in their entirety.
7. **Insufficient resources.** Due to limited financial resources usually provided by towns and municipalities as the owners of war graves, there is a risk that a part of the monuments could lose their value or become dilapidated due to lack of maintenance. Despite available grants, the expenses for reconstruction and renewal of the monuments could exceed available resources.
8. **Negative and destructive stance of a part of society.** Vandalism and negative reactions to various geopolitical situations are often due to a lack of understanding. This leads to simple damaging of war graves and memorials, which are chosen at random as a target of anger caused by current events.
9. **Unengaged, neglectful and disinterested stance of local administrations.** Lack of effort exerted by municipal and regional authorities in matters of war graves care and commemorative sites means that they rarely prioritize the topic. Despite educational activities, there often is no significant change in their lax approach to the matter.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Apart from generally binding rules, Czech legislation contains an integral set of resolutions which impact war graves and commemorative sites care. Currently, this includes mainly:

- Act No. 122/2004 Coll., on War Graves and Commemorative Sites and on the amendment of the Act No. 256/2001 Coll., on Undertaking and on the amendment to certain Acts, as amended;
- Act No. 256/2001 Coll., on Undertaking and on the amendment to certain Acts, as amended;
- Act No. 20/1987 Coll., on National Monuments Care, as amended;
- other Acts¹⁹.

On the international level, war graves care is governed by a set of regulations of whom the Czech Republic is a signatory. These include first of all peace treaties following the World Wars signed by Czechoslovakia, and the Czech Republic as its legal successor respects them and upholds them. In matters of war, the documents include the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field of 12 August 1949, with emphasis on the Additional Protocol for the protection of war victims of international armed conflicts of 8 June 1977. These are followed by international treaties on war graves care which reflect obligations of the Geneva Conventions and its Protocols in the form of framework and bilateral agreements. The Czech Government is also bound by provisions under intergovernmental agreements on mutual maintenance of war graves concluded with Governments of individual states.

The legal framework for the care of war graves and commemorative sites in the Czech Republic is, in some respects, obsolete and lacks complexity, which requires immediate change. A partial solution would be the adoption of new legislation as suggested in line 8 of the *Ten priorities for Defence*²⁰ which focuses on the support of veterans and tradition, and represents a key step to an update of the legal framework of the care of war graves and commemorative sites both at home and abroad.

¹⁹ Acts whose content influences war graves care: Act No. 152/2023 Coll., amending the Act No. 283/2021 Coll., Building Act, as per Act No. 195/2022 Coll., and some other related Acts; Act No. 301/2000 Coll., on Register, Names and Surnames and on the amendment to certain Acts, as amended; Act No. 218/2000 Coll., on Budgetary Rules and on the amendment to certain Acts (budgetary rules), as amended; Act No. 89/2012 Coll., Civil Code, as amended.

²⁰ *Ten priorities for Defence*, presented by the Minister of Defence Jana Černochohá at a press conference on 10 January 2022.

It is generally favourable that the amendment takes up on potential updates to other legislation which influence the care of war graves and commemorative sites, such as the War Veterans Act (victims of modern military missions) or the long-awaited National Heritage Act. The amended Act No. 122/2004 Coll., shall take into account the following:

- refinement of the term war grave and completion of the definition of general provisions for war graves and commemorative sites;
- war graves of those who died in foreign missions. The Act No. 122/2004 Coll. needs to explicitly define war graves holding the remains of and commemorative sites dedicated to fallen participants of foreign missions with regard to the rights of bereaved family members (due to limitations on use of war graves);
- inclusion of victims of wartime persecution or of military operations for religious, political, nationality and racial reasons, victims of wartime air strikes and of the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 in war graves care;
- include in Act No. 122/2004 Coll. the fact that victims of war or military operations could have died before the official start date of the war or military operation as well as the fact that victims of war or military operation could have died after the official end date of war or military operation;
- inclusion of spaces, memorials and graves linked to our military history which do not fulfil the definition of a war grave but their construction or repair can be financed through newly created financial items;
- refining rights and obligations of owners of war graves and inclusion of a new category, lessee of a war grave, which is not yet included in the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.;
- proposal of amendment and new definition of sanctions linked to Section 2(5) of the existing Act No. 122/2004 Coll. The proposed amendment of Section 5 of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. shall contain a definition that “a breach of said Act leads to corresponding administrative, civic or criminal liability”. We require refining of terms stated in Section 5 (1) a), b), c). It is also necessary to reevaluate financial sanctions in Section 5 (2) a), b), c).
- inclusion of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. in acts linked to the topic in which it was not previously included such as Act No. 20/1987 Coll., on National Heritage Care, as amended.

3.1 Geneva Conventions, international treaties and agreements

The declared activity of the Section includes the honouring of the memory of those fallen in wars regardless of their nationality or religion. Our objective is to create a war graves care system which is in line with standards for war graves care of the Transatlantic civilization.

These efforts are based in principles defined by the Geneva Conventions on the protection of war victims of 12 August 1949 and Additional Protocols I and II of 8 June 1977 of which the Czech Republic is a signatory and resolutions of intergovernmental agreements on mutual maintenance of war graves concluded with Governments of individual states.

For the above-mentioned reasons, we set and keep upholding the following:

- we assist with the search, recording, maintenance and repairs of war graves;
- we exchange information on locations and state of war graves;
- we perform exchange of war graves lists and related documentation;
- we provide protection and maintenance of war graves in individual states;
- we uphold laws, and religious and other traditions of both participating states during the protection, maintenance and repair of newly created war graves;
- we provide the monitoring of the state of war graves through diplomatic and consular missions or other authorized entities;
- we share information on all known incidents which breach rights regarding war graves in the territory of the other contractual state.

Through international treaties, we intend to launch cooperation with international institutions which specialize in war graves care. We intend to perform a revision of existing intergovernmental agreements and take steps to enter into new agreements with Austria, Germany Hungary, and Italy. Given our shared history, we have a special interest in cooperating with institutions such as the Austrian Schwarzes Kreuz and German Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge eV. We will use the ongoing analysis of international activities and construction of memorials, which focuses on the events of the past 15 years. This analysis represents a starting point for the setup and development of current and future projects and helps define future cooperation with foreign institutions as well.

4. COMPLEX CARE OF WAR GRAVES: VISION AND STRATEGY

The next chapter is devoted to our comprehensive agenda that has been defined since the Section's inception. It will focus on memorial diplomacy, coordination principles for care of Czech war graves abroad, and the role of the Defence Attaché Offices in this process. It will also provide a closer look at war graves care both in the Czech Republic and abroad and will introduce the priority areas and key technological projects in progress.

4.1 Memorial diplomacy

Due to its historical development and military tradition, the Czech Republic has a broad range of instruments at its disposal, which can be grouped under the term memorial diplomacy. Memorial diplomacy can be regarded as a part of memory diplomacy which uses remembrance and commemoration of historical events, mostly tragic ones, for foreign-policy goals. It is a complex field which uses the past to create the future of international relationships. States and political parties try to improve their relationships and self-image by exporting their memory politics and connecting their historical experience with that of other countries.

In contrast to memory conflicts focusing on the criticism of alternative views on history, memory diplomacy focuses on the creation of memory allies, rather than enemies. Memory diplomacy and the memorials linked to it assume, due to their influence on public opinion, an important position in public diplomacy.²¹ In this context, a war grave/commemoration site represents a place serving as a fundamental object for the historical memory and historical events' commemoration.

There is another definition of memorial diplomacy which focuses on its role in the context of national identity and memory. According to this definition, memorial diplomacy is a strategy which uses building and maintaining memorials and commemoration sites for the formation of collective memory and national identity. This strategy is often used to promote specific historical narratives, strengthen national pride and the citizens' sense of belonging with their country. War graves/commemoration sites are perceived as symbols linking to key events,

²¹ One of the goals firmly embedded in the concept of the Czech Republic's foreign policy, which came into effect in July 2015, is the dissemination of "good reputation abroad," which is the main task of Czech public diplomacy. That plays an important role in the support of the MoD other diplomatic activities, for example presentation events taking place abroad, Czech culture propagation, school cooperation development, deepening non-profit sector's activities in connection to foreign partners. Conferences, seminars, and other outreach events are also an important part of public diplomacy.

figures, or values connected to the nation's history, and they help to create and strengthen national identity. The memorials represent a platform for political, social, and cultural values' expression and they can also be used to promote international reconciliation. This utilisation of memorial diplomacy influences the view of the past, the present, and the future of the country in both the internal and external policies.

Paying tribute by remembering certain events and individuals through ceremonies or educational programmes is also a part of the complex process. This way, the established foreign policy goals that the respective countries want to achieve in interaction with other countries can be monitored.

4.1.1 The means of memorial diplomacy execution

- **reconciliation encouragement:** by remembering the shared suffering, countries can build trust and improve post-conflict relationships. Its aim is to impact the domestic and international public opinion by emphasizing the shared history.
- **actions legitimisation:** countries put emphasis on the past in order to justify their current activities on the global scene.
- **historical events' formation:** countries can use the memorials to favour their version of history, thus influencing other countries' access to history.

When implementing memory diplomacy, it is essential to bear in mind that different cultures interpret the past differently. Orientation in national narratives requires a sensitive approach since there is a high risk of historical manipulation. The instruments described in the present Concept as memorial diplomacy are being used by not just the world powers (United States of America, Russia), but also by countries similar to the Czech Republic (Poland, Hungary).

By means of the war graves located on the European continent, the United States of America enforce their transatlantic ties, this having been a key mechanism utilized to legitimize the American commitment to the Continent at the time of the Cold War. The ongoing presence of the United States in Europe is not just a matter of strategic calculation, economic ties, or geopolitical priorities, but it also stems from the shared war experience. Russia, as the successor of the Soviet Union, executes the politics of demarcating the sphere of its influence by means of memorial diplomacy. Here, memorial diplomacy serves as an instrument of politics and coercion. It uses this policy especially in post-communist countries. The Czech Republic has its own experience with this attitude mainly in connection with the removal of the statue of

Marshal Konev in Prague in 2020. Examples of countries where the memories of the World Wars and thus the approach to memorial diplomacy differ are France and Germany. While France puts emphasis on honouring the memory of the fallen soldiers, Germany focuses on atonement and remembering all victims. This continuous memory diplomacy forms their present relationship as well.

4.2 The Czech Republic and memorial diplomacy

By creating a dedicated section and defining specific goals leading to the enhancement of care of war graves, the MoD answered the importance of this domain. As a result of the active involvement of the Czech lands' people in both World Wars and other military conflicts, the essential prerequisite for its utilisation is met. Moreover, the employment of Czechoslovak/Czech soldiers does not, with some exceptions, stir any controversies and is seen as positive. The Czech Republic is not associated with wars of conquest, imperialism, and colonialism. After both World Wars, Czechoslovakia joined the allies of the winning coalition. The fact that we have registered war graves in 49 countries all over the world testifies to the Czech military commitment. This creates broad space for multilateral cooperation and incorporation of the topic of war graves as one of the tools of public diplomacy.

4.2.1 Fundamental support for international cooperation is provided by intergovernmental agreements regarding the care for war graves:

- Agreement between the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic and the Government of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland on the Mutual Upkeep of War Graves (1949);
- Agreement between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Government of the Russian Federation on the Mutual Upkeep of War Graves (1999);
- Agreement between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Government of the Slovak Republic on War Graves (2003);
- Agreement between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the Care of War Graves (2005);
- Agreement between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Government of Romania on War Graves (2015);

- Agreement between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on War Graves (2017);
- Agreement between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the Protection of War Graves and Military Commemorative Sites (2017).

4.2.2 The areas of cooperation are well defined for all intergovernmental agreements. In particular, they include:

- help with the search for, registering, upkeeping, and adjusting the war graves;
- mutual awareness of the location and the condition of war graves;
- mutual exchange of relevant war graves lists and their addenda;
- securing the protection of war graves in the territory of the states of accreditation and keeping them recognizable;
- adherence to legislation, national, religious, and other traditions of both states during the protection, upkeep, and adjustment of war graves;
- right of supervision over the state of war graves via the diplomatic and consular offices (or other authorised bodies);
- mutual awareness of all known cases of unlawful acts against the other party's war graves;
- initiation of the construction of new war graves in the territory of the state of assignment;
- securing the restoration of damaged war graves to their original state.

4.2.3 The basic legal framework for cooperation is set by intergovernmental agreements. However, it is fair to say that in most countries, the agreements are not being fulfilled sufficiently. This relates mainly to mutual awareness, searching, and registration. Due to the priorities we have set, it will be necessary to raise the issue of an agreement revision. Our priority will be to focus on the agreements with Slovenia, Serbia, Romania, and Ukraine for the purpose of identification of the graves and fallen soldiers of the World War I. In cases where agreements presume the existence of a joint expert commission for problem resolution (in the case of Slovenia and Serbia) we will urge their establishment and active operation.

4.2.4 Intense cooperation with partner institutions: concerning other possible intergovernmental agreements that would provide the basic framework for mutual communication and

cooperation, the short-term goal is to intensify the cooperation with the partner institutions in Austria, Hungary, and Italy. In order to cooperate effectively, we want to initiate regular negotiations with the potential to create a joint expert commission. Sharing the history of the First World War with Austria and Hungary makes them our key partners. Joint projects can be realised in the Balkan, Central Asia, Italy, Poland, and Ukraine.

4.3 The war detective: the relationship of memorial diplomacy and archival research

In the context of application of the abovementioned procedures, it is necessary to emphasise that memorial diplomacy is inextricably linked to archival research. Therefore, we will focus on mutual experience sharing in archival research with the aim to create or connect the databases integrated in the Central War Graves Registry with our foreign co-workers' databases. The archival research method is a key part of work of the so-called war detectives, such as the British Ministry of Defence's team Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre Commemorations. These experts systematically research military historical records which enables them to identify as many fallen service members as possible. We realize, that due to completely objective reasons, we do not yet have the possibility to carry out genealogical research to find the families of the victims and test the DNA in the areas where the victims have been found. Therefore, as part of the archaeological research we are planning on establishing cooperation with appropriate institutions, as further described in Chapter 4.6.6. *The use of archaeology.*

Our mission are given not only by the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. but also by our moral obligation. It is our duty to identify and honour those, who had been buried anonymously or whose resting place has not yet been localised, although we know their names or have other identifying data available. We are compiling lists and developing databases using archival-historical methods and we are taking all steps necessary to register the fallen soldiers and their remains; for more information see Chapters 4.6.2 *Archival research for war graves in the Czech Republic* and 4.10.1 *Archival research for foreign countries.*

The Section's one-year long activity already shows results stemming from our working with the Commission for Mass Graves Resolution at the Ďáblice cemetery of the Government of the Czech Republic, where a current member of the Section's staff operates and carries out their

research. Currently, we have knowledge concerning the finding and identification of the remains of persons who meet the provisions of Act No. 122/2004 Coll. in a localised “Shaft tomb no. 1 – Air raid” in the aforementioned cemetery. Thanks to archival research, we have traced and verified the burial story of the American soldier Lawrence L. Ordway. Similarly, we want to continue finding, identifying, and localizing more places that could be declared and subsequently registered as war graves holding human remains according to Act No. 122/2004 Coll. Thus, we come back to memorial diplomacy and commit to the realisation of projects that include building war graves, memorials, tombstones, and other remembrance sites. At the same time, we make all possible efforts to bury these heroes with dignity and to share their stories through specialist publications which will be created in cooperation with the Military History Institute Prague. As part of our PR strategy, we are trying to ensure that their sacrifice is never forgotten.

4.4 The principles of coordination of Czech war graves abroad

The care of war graves abroad observes several fundamental principles which reflect the meaning and dignity of military historical traditions. In the first place, war graves are an integral part of these traditions and must therefore neither be omitted nor neglected. The soldiers and airmen who lost their lives in armed conflicts must never be forgotten. This inalienable principle demands for every fallen soldier and airman to have a symbolic grave at least. Our task is, based on the archival documents provided by the War Graves Register (for its contents see Chapter 4.6.3. *The war graves cadastre*), to identify these graves, find them, and inspect their current condition on site. In case of damage to such a grave, it is our duty to strive for its fastest and highest-quality reparation. Should a grave already be destroyed or cancelled, we must not remain passive. On the contrary, we must actively seek its renewal. If there is no possibility to renew the grave in the original place, alternative forms of commemoration of the fallen service member are pursued. Those include building a memorial in another suitable place or placing a memorial plaque bearing the names of the fallen along with the event leading to their death. In cases where the care of war graves abroad necessarily requires financial resources, the realisation, preservation, and renewal of the value of these commemorative sites is based on the Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 1292 of 6 December 1999 on the Principles for the provision and use of specific grants from the state budget for ensuring the care for war graves in the Czech Republic and monetary donations to foreign countries. These

measures aim to ensure adequate care of the graves of our fallen service members and maintain their memory in the best possible condition.

While the authentication and entering of the information regarding the war graves in the territory of the Czech Republic is done primarily by the staff of municipal authorities with extended powers or regions, for the graves abroad it is solely the Section's staff who has the authority. That results in high time and qualification requirements which has to be taken into consideration when filling the Section's vacancies in the future.

The principles of coordination of care of war graves abroad are worked up in the *Methodology for the care of war graves abroad procedure*. The fulfilment of these principle lies in:

- clarifying the importance of Czech war graves abroad for they are the graves of soldiers who fought for our state's independence, formed its armed forces, fought for independence again and then have defended our civilisation's values;
- presenting the data regarding Czech war graves available;
- informing the states of assignment of the good condition of war graves located in the Czech Republic and using these circumstances to request the other party's reciprocal approach;
- emphasizing the existence of international commitments and the necessity to adhere to traditions and good manners;
- gathering and verifying data regarding Czech war graves in the extent defined by the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. including the use of archives;
- requesting the specifics of a war grave's destruction including the circumstances and the place where the buried soldiers' remains have been relocated;
- organising commemoration functions at Czech war graves on regular basis;
- including the issue of Czech war graves care as one of the main topics of business plans and work meetings of not only the Defence Attaché but also the Embassy staff, plus the Ambassador;

- informing the MoD WVVWD of the outcomes of activity in the area of Czech war graves care on regular basis.

4.4.1 Cooperation with DAOs

In order to apply these principles of care of Czech war graves abroad effectively, we need to establish and maintain effective cooperation with the DAOs accredited in the states of assignment or other authorized Czech Embassies' staff. Czech diplomats abroad are, thanks to their knowledge of the regulatory environment, key to assessing the state of Czech war graves in the state of assignment.

4.4.2 Cooperation with foreign organisations

Apart from official Czech institutions operating abroad, it is one of our main goals to also establish active cooperation with national organisations (archives, museums, history-oriented non-profit organisations) of relevant countries. Mainly, we will focus on maintaining productive cooperation with our Austrian, Italian, Hungarian, and Polish partners with emphasis on the influence on Central-East and South-East Europe, the area that includes the former borders of Austria-Hungary at the peak of its territorial expansion and its geopolitical reach towards today's countries of the Western Balkan region. This cooperation will include the establishment of functional relationships, expansion of the registry by linking it with other states' registries, observing best practices, realisation of projects, establishment of commemoration sites, PR strategy, specialist publications, and systematic development of memorial diplomacy in different forms.

4.4.3 Membership in EWHWG

In the short term, we seek to become an active member of the European War Heritage Working Group. Its aim is to maintain a common policy when commemorating not only the soldiers who laid their lives in war conflicts but war victims in general. Following the founding members, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, United Kingdom and the Netherlands, every year more members join the association, for example the U.S.A. or EU countries (Austria, Slovenia). Being a member of the association offers the perfect space for communication and cooperation with partner institutions abroad. It will allow us to discover the scope (legislation, financing, state institution and public support) of the partner institutions' functioning, making it easier to work on joint projects. The key focus of this cooperation would be sharing of information enabling the identification and registration of war graves as well as their renewal and reconstruction by means of joint financing.

4.5 The role of DAOs in war graves care

The role of DAOs in the Czech war graves care is irreplaceable. War graves are an integral and essential part of military historical traditions, and their upkeep should not only be a duty but also a natural honour of the senior Czech military officials abroad. The MoD WVG staff provide regular trainings for the Defence Attachés.

4.5.1 Evaluation of the regulatory environment of the state of accreditation

War graves care is especially influenced by these facts:

- which governmental unit is responsible for war graves care in the territory of the state of accreditation, the status of various elements of state administration in the war graves care system;
- the scope of their responsibility, the resources they have at their disposal to realize the war graves care;
- the structure of Government bodies' responsibility regarding war graves care whose right or duty it is to establish or renew a war grave, keep it recognizable, relocate or cancel it;
- war graves care financing system;
- system of sanctions and penalties in cases of violation of legal norms governing war graves care;
- national, religious, and other traditions that might influence the Czech war graves care;
- the ways in which other states address war graves care and how their experience can be utilised in care of Czech war graves.

4.5.2 Analysis of the situation

Knowledge of the regulatory environment and the assessment of the condition of Czech war graves in the country of assignment will help develop a care model for these graves. The scope of this model will be defined particularly by:

- the number and position of Czech war graves in the territory of the state of accreditation;
- the number of victims buried in the war graves;
- physical condition of the war graves.

Analysing the facts above will enable the selection of relevant government and local administration bodies that will need to be asked for assistance regarding the care for Czech war

graves. In the same vein, it would also be appropriate to approach veteran and other social and non-governmental organisations (possibly also commercial entities) and establish cooperation in this area. The analysis should produce a list, order, and schedule according to which Czech war graves will be repaired or renewed (in case of those that have been damaged).

4.5.3 Central registry management, contact information

The MoD WVGWD keeps a registry of Czech war graves in the state of accreditation with the support of the DAO and in the extent of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. and keeps expanding it by newly acquired data. Relevant training regarding the issue is continuously provided as part of the preparation before their assignment and annual meetings of DAO heads.

4.5.4 The DAO head's activity regarding the care of war graves

- keeping record of the state of war graves in the state of assignment and controlling them regularly;
- in case that the state of a war grave is unsatisfactory (dilapidation etc.), ensuring its repair in cooperation with local authorities and the MoD WVGWD;
- following a prior agreement with a chosen local authority, applying for the allocation of a donation for the MoD WVGWD via the Military Diplomacy Department;
- after the request is approved by the MoD, the head of DAO draws up a sample contract of donation stating the local authority according to regulatory conditions valid in the country of assignment;
- overseeing the realization and reporting any potential problems to the Military Diplomacy Department.

4.5.5 The role of Czech diplomatic missions abroad

There is no DAO in many of the places where Czech war graves are located. In such cases, in regard to the issue of war graves and related activities, diplomatic missions, especially consular offices, play a key role. On significant days such as May 8th, October 28th, November 11th, local anniversaries, during the visits of important Czech delegations, the graves of our fallen soldiers and airmen should always be decorated with wreaths or flowers as a token of remembrance. In connection to that, the best solution seems to be engaging a great number of honorary consuls all over the world.

4.6 War graves care in the Czech Republic

4.6.1 Memorial diplomacy and war graves in the Czech Republic

Memorial diplomacy does not only consist of care of war graves abroad; one of its integral parts is also care of foreign soldiers' and airmen's graves located in the Czech Republic. In our territory, the remains of soldiers from many different countries and of many nationalities and religions are laid to rest. Based on the way our state will tend its graves, our cultural and civilizational maturity will be perceived abroad. We are lucky that we do not have to draw inspiration abroad but can build on the First Republic tradition characterized by thorough record keeping regarding war graves and their upkeep. By means of a grant scheme, the MoD will support the establishment and reconstruction of war graves located in the Czech Republic regardless of citizenship, nationality, and religion of the fallen service members. We will proceed fully along the lines of the agreements concluded and other legislation. In the medium-term, we want to continue, with the local administration's assistance, our work on projects such as Černovír, which surpass Czech borders by their importance. We will continue to develop high quality care of war graves of foreign service members from the World War II period (Romania, Soviet Union) located in our territory. Due to the rising interest of the post-Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) in their fallen service members, we are expecting closer cooperation concerning war graves identification and archival document sharing.

4.6.2 Archival research for war graves in the Czech Republic

Archival research, currently overlooked, will now take an essential part in our care of war graves and commemoration sites strategy. Aware of its significance, we define it as the second fundamental pillar of our activity. Archival research is a systematic process in which historical documents and sources stored in archival institutions are being examined. Its aim is to acquire new knowledge about the past, analyse historic events and processes through the study of written material such as letters, records, official documents, and other historical sources. Archival research represents a key method of historical exploration and allows for understanding and interpretation of past events.

4.6.3 The War Graves Cadastre

There is a number of unregistered war graves from World War I period in the Czech territory whose registration and upkeep had been influenced by times of unfreedom, especially by the Communist regime. In order to remedy this situation, it is key to process the archives in the War Graves Register which is stored in the Military Historical Archives. This register primarily contains the Czechoslovak War Graves Cadastre from the years 1918–1938, which already builds upon the Austria-Hungarian War grave cadastre. The War Graves Cadastre registers

graves from World War I and the following conflicts concerning the borders of the newly established Czechoslovakia. The registry contains 275 archival boxes of documents regarding graves of fallen soldiers which include for example the plans containing the exact location of war graves holding remains both in the territory of today's Czech Republic and abroad. These documents will serve as a significant source of information about the occurrence of war graves holding the remains of soldiers born in the territory of former Czechoslovakia and killed in World War I as part of the Austria-Hungarian army and Czechoslovak legions.

4.6.4 The process of war graves finding and registration

The process of war graves finding and registration requires cooperation of municipal and regional authorities and will include other historical periods, such as World War II. Archival research also applies to international cooperation on care for war graves of foreign soldiers to which the Czech Republic is bound by international agreements. In order to handle this demanding process, we have launched the War Graves Register digitization project at the beginning of 2024 in cooperation with the Military History Institute Prague and the Military Historical Archives. The project's aim is to completely digitize the register and use it for the needs of all organisations involved. The digitization is carried out at the Military Historical Archives via a digitization line and with the help of the Department's external workers. Currently, more than 40 archival boxes have been re-photographed with the photographs then being processed according to relevant digitization standards. We are planning on finishing the digitization of the register in 2026 and we will publish the processed documents at the Digital study and Digital archive of the MoD websites.

4.6.5 Using digitized documents for the CWGR app

The processed documents will be divided by the Section's staff according to today's municipal authorities with extended powers and then received by the war graves care coordinators at regional and municipal level. Their task is to fill in the data about the fallen from the registration sheets and find and register the still unregistered fallen soldiers and war graves. The Section provides these workers with methodical and expert support throughout this long-term activity.

4.6.6 The use of archaeology

In many cases, the Section's workers have been informed about the existence of a war grave holding remains, located outside of the burial site which is often the case with World War II graves. The localization of these graves is usually backed by data of different quality, ranging from witness testimonies through chronicle entries to official period records. Yet it is sometimes

still problematic to confirm the existence of a grave and register it. There are also cases in which it would be appropriate or even necessary to move a war grave to a burial site, however, exhuming the remains is complicated and requires expert approach. The solution to both problems is to exhume the remains by means of archaeological research, yet not all war graves owners are able to arrange for it and fund it. It is quite common for state institutions abroad, for example in Poland, to use archaeologists when searching for and exhuming war graves. In the future, we would therefore like to establish cooperation with some of the state archaeological institutions, university archaeology department, or a private archaeology firm that would carry out archaeological research and search for war graves under our supervision and according to our instructions as done in other states. If the archaeological research was to be realized through a private archaeological firm, it would be necessary to take this fact into consideration in regard to the budget as further discussed in chapter 5.8 *Increase of funding to secure war graves care*.

4.6.7 Illegal war graves search and excavation

In case of illegal search for and the related excavation of war graves, it is necessary to cooperate with the National Heritage Institute and the Ministry of Culture.

In the last decade of the 20th century, the first metal detectors appeared in the Czech Republic and their owners with interest in war history started to explore the areas of known battlefields from the medieval period until World War II. They search illegally for war graves and burial sites with the intention to excavate and retrieve artefacts. Apart from metal parts of equipment, arms, and ammunition, personal effects of soldiers and airmen buried individually and collectively are also being uncovered. The discoverer usually takes metal items or personal belonging of the fallen service member and leaves the remains in place, rendering their future identification impossible. This leads to the violation of many legal regulations: particularly the Civil Code, the Act on War Graves, and in some cases even the Criminal Code, as some battlefields have been proclaimed landscape monument zones (Slavkov 1805, Chlumec 1813, Hradec Králové 1866). However, the majority of battlefields located in our territory are not protected, for example Bílá hora and Rakovník 1620, Třebel 1647, Žďár 1745, Kolín 1757, Jičín 1866.

Illegal “diggers” and searchers thus violate the Act 122/2004 Coll., the Act 256/2001 Coll. on Undertaking and the Act 193/2017 Coll. The only known battlefield that has been “ridden” of war graves is the one near Chlumec 1813 which in 1827, Prince Lobkowitz, the landowner, had uncovered and the human remains excavated and collected in a common grave since their

quantity complicated the agricultural use of the land. That, however, does not exclude possible occurrence of war graves that were unmarked in 1827 and therefore omitted. Given the National Heritage Institute's record keeping of landscape monument zones and their proclamation by the Ministry of Culture, it is further important to cooperate with these state institutions on the protection of unmarked war graves according to the Act 122/2004 Coll. Considering the amount of evidence on soldiers and airmen being buried in the place of their killing, the land where a battle took place is *de facto* a burial site. Reliable identification of battlefields and war graves has been possible since the modern era, i.e. since 1618, but battlefields older than 1478 have not yet been localized and given the absence of written sources it is not even possible to state, whether the discovery of human remains showing injuries is a proof of war conflict or a criminal act.

4.6.8. Rise in the number of war graves

In the next few years, the rise in the number of war graves in our territory is expected due to the processing of the aforementioned War Graves Cadastre. Next, we are planning on initiating the renewal of the vanished war graves and commemoration sites situated in military districts and in displaced borderlands. Moreover, requests made by individual units of the Czech Armed Forces for the building of new commemoration sites appear more frequently now and since 2024, the MoD has also been managing the Vítkov National Memorial which contains one of the most important war graves in our territory, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The staff of the Section will be involved in all these projects and in many cases, this will lead to the widening of the agenda and the creation of tasks which have not been dealt with until now. Finally, due to this rise in the number of war graves, the funding provided by the MoD regarding the renewal and building of war graves will need to increase.

4.7 Development of the Central War Graves Registry

4.7.1 War Graves Registry is built upon three pillars:

- CWGR application – for state administration employees to keep records of war graves at the level of municipalities with extended power, aggregate registry of war graves at regional levels and CWGR at the MoD level;
- CWGR application users – employees of all three levels of the state administration participating in war graves recordkeeping;
- CWGR-PP – public portal for online presentation of war graves data.

4.7.2 CWGR application project

The development of the project is now fully finalized and includes functions focused on supporting the effectiveness of the state administration and the administration of the Database of the Fallen including the tool for linking the database and the war graves register. The project will be operated on MoD servers with technical support from the CWGR application provider who will focus on solving unusual situations.

4.7.3 Central War Graves Registry project – public portal (CWGR-PP)

The CWGR public portal was created in 2009 to publish CWGR data. Currently, the portal also includes data on war graves from the database of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic and the Database of the Fallen of the Military History Institute Prague. A new project is currently underway which focuses on popularizing military history in connection with war graves. The project will include a discussion forum, easy search tools, classifications and simple displays of information of war graves, fallen service members and export of basic data on war grave sites in formats suitable for the creation of maps. It shall also serve as a communication channel between the state administration and general or expert public in order to gather new information and precise existing information in accordance with the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. The modernisation of the CWGR public portal will be performed in 2024 – 2025 through and upgrade of the portal – acquisition of the service and will be financed through the 10729 grants program “Preservation and restoration of historical values”.

4.8 QR codes project

We plan for the implementation of QR codes at war graves and commemorative sites. Scanning the QR code will open up the CWGR public portal and show all information relevant to the war grave and fallen service member as well as other information on the commemorative site of the CWGR and Database of fallen service members. In the first implementation phase, within the fulfilment of the 10729 grants program “Preservation and restoration of historical values I for 2020 – 2029”, the implementation of QR codes in war graves and commemorative sites is a mandatory condition. In the second phase, this condition will also be applied to applicants from previous years and in the third and final phase, it will be required that all owners mark war graves with QR codes.

4.9 New honorary military burial grounds project

The Czech Republic lacks national military burial grounds to offer a place of final rest to modern Czech veterans as well as to the remains of war heroes and victims, who have so far been buried abroad (such as paratroopers of the Iridium and Bronze drops or members of the

State Defence Guard abducted in autumn of 1938). The cemetery would also serve as the place of the final rest of military personalities whose graves are currently neglected and uncared for. The tradition of national military cemeteries is rooted in the history of numerous countries and is a symbol of respect to those whose sacrificed their lives in the name of protection and security of their homeland. The creation and administration of national cemeteries shows each nation's gratitude to those buried and honour the memory of those, who served long ago and recently, with bravery and devotion but did not have a family of their own or close ones to provide a dignified place of their last rest.

4.10 Czech war graves care abroad

This section details the care of Czech war graves abroad and future plans. We shall focus on proposed strategies of maintenance, renewal and installation of new war graves and commemorative sites.

4.10.1 Archive research for war graves abroad

From the perspective of an international agenda, a key element is the search for war graves of service members from the territory of the current Czech Republic who died during their service in the Austro-Hungarian Army. Out of the estimated 250 thousand service members who died abroad, only approximately 3 thousand are accounted for. Archive research in the War Graves Cadastre helps identify approximate locations of war graves and more precise localisation can be then done on site. The first successful attempt of identification took place during our trip to Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia in spring of 2024, where archived documents led to the localisation of Czech war graves. This approach suggests the future direction of archive research and its use in localisation of Czech war graves abroad, not only in our areas of priority.

4.10.2 Priorities

4.10.2.1 Cooperation with Italy

In Italy, our activity has so far been limited to legionnaires, while Austro-Hungarian soldiers were neglected. Progressive archive research suggests that over 100 war grave locations with tens of thousands of victims from the current Czech territory have not been recorded, although local authorities in northern Italy, such as the Honorary Consulate in Udine, have a clearly positive stance to the matter. Based on both archive and on-site research, we shall launch projects of renewal and reconstruction of military cemeteries from World War I which contain remains of Austro-Hungarian soldiers of Czech origin.

4.10.2.2 Cooperation with Austria and Hungary

We plan to offer cooperation to the Austrian Schwarzes Kreuz and the Hungarian War Graves Department of the Ministry of Defence in matters of war graves in Italy and Slovenia, to meet interests of the Czech public. In many cases, travels to Italy and Slovenia includes visits of locations linked to the fates of our ancestors who fought in World War I. War graves can thus also serve as an attractive tourist location and their maintenance can improve Czech Republic's image.

4.10.2.3 Cooperation with Germany

In the past, talks were held with Germany on the possibility to conclude an agreement on war graves care. However, the agreement was not finalized due to different interpretations of events leading to immediate post-war development (uncontrolled expulsion of German citizens from the Czech territory). Almost 80 years after the end of World War II, we are of the opinion that it is necessary to deal with matters of shared history and increasingly cooperate with Germany (Volksbund). It is in the interest of both parties to take up on our cooperation in the form of exhumation of German soldiers' remains and burying them in designated locations in the Czech Republic.

4.10.2.4 Development of memorial diplomacy in central Asian countries

In the first phase, we will start with the reconstruction and establishment of war graves in Kazakhstan (Fort Shevchenko, Shymkent, Petropavl) and Uzbekistan (Tashkent). During three trips to central Asia in 2021-23, discussions on the parliamentary and local level were held on the renewal of war graves of Austro-Hungarian prisoners of World War I. The number of Czech prisoners who died in this location is around 10 thousand and we can match names to individual locations. First effort is to focus at establishing war graves in capitals of regional centres. It is not necessary to establish a war grave in all locations where war graves once existed. An important criterion is the accessibility of the war grave and its use for the purpose of promoting the Czech Republic.

4.10.2.5 The Balkan peninsula

The Balkan peninsula is another location convenient for the development of memorial diplomacy. The military history and culture of the Balkan countries contain a Czech trace which is positively viewed. Intense cooperation with the region and especially with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes impacted the topic of war graves. Given the then conditions, significant materials were gathered. In 2025, we wish to join the Hungarian and Austrian party to renew the reconstruction of the WWI cemetery in Belgrade (Novo groblje). Another suitable location for the establishment of a war grave in Serbia is the forest cemetery in the premises of

the Kragujevac memorial. The placing of a plaque with names of the fallen in the memorial will be subject to future negotiation. In the medium term, we will focus on the renewal and reconstruction of war graves in North Macedonia (Skopje, Prilep, Bitola), and Albania (Tirana, Skadar, Lezha). In 2025-26, we shall carry out reconnaissance of war graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Romania. The renewal and reconstruction of war graves in these locations shall take place based on archive research with the War Graves Register as the main source.

4.10.2.6 Projects in Poland and Ukraine

Although the main objectives of the concept focus on the victims of World War I, we will also continue our projects aimed at commemorating Czech service members who died on the Eastern Front during World War II. This includes mainly projects in Poland (e.g. Dukla) and Ukraine (e.g. Sokolovo). We perceive it as a vital objective to maintain war graves of such significant battlefields in a dignified state. We will of course have to reflect the current political and military situation.

4.10.3 Overview of activities in 2005–2023

In the next section, we will cover the evolution of Czech war graves care in Russia and Ukraine and due to the specific situation in those countries, we add the Table 4.10.3.3 *Overview of activities in individual states in 2005–2023*. The table lists Czech war graves in individual countries as well as related activities in 2005–2023 while sorting them into categories. We focus not only on the ongoing monitoring of the graves, but we also look for ways to start a dialogue with relevant representatives and identify suitable topics. It is key to travel to the relevant locations to establish personal contact with the representatives of the countries and start an interactive dialogue to build sustainable diplomatic relationships and help the care of Czech war graves.

4.10.3.1 Situation in Russia

The care of Czech war graves in Russia is governed by the Agreement concluded between the Government of the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation in 1999. The Ministry of Defence of Russia and the Military Memorials Association are the authorities responsible for the graves. Between 2007 and 2017, the MoD provided over CZK 20 million for the renewal of Czechoslovak war graves in Russia (15 locations). However, this agreement has long been disregarded, including Russia's threats linked to other matters such as the removal of the statue of Marshal Konev in Prague. This led to the declination of invitation to the regular meetings of

the Czech-Russian joint intergovernmental committee for war graves and in 2020, to the requested return of 8.5 million roubles designated for the repairs of war graves.

4.10.3.2 Situation in Ukraine

The Czech Government concluded the Agreement on war graves with the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in 2013. In Ukraine, war graves care is provided by the National Memory Institute Ukraine and the National Intergovernmental Committee for the maintenance of memory of participants of counterterrorist operations and victims of wars. The financing of war graves care is done in cooperation with the Vysočina Region through the ViZa fund. The Ministry provided a total of CZK 10.8 million from 2006 to 2020 for the renewal of war graves of Czechoslovak service members in Ukraine. Locations who received funds for the construction or renewal of war graves include Uzhhorod, Uzhok Pass, Ozerna, and others. In Kyiv, Czechoslovak war graves were renewed, and a new grave was created for Czechoslovak tank crews in Chernyakhiv. A total of 4.4 million hryvnia was allocated to the ViZa fund.

4.10.3.3 Overview of activities in individual states in 2005–2023

Country: locations/WGs/ victims	Institution/key partners	Agreements/treaties	Donations up to 2023/ projects	Outlook from 2023
Afghanistan: 1/1/10	-	NO	-	Monitoring
Albania: 1/1/1	DAO Tirana	NO	-	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Australia: 2/2	DM (diplomatic mission)	NO	-	Monitoring
Austria: 7/14/96	DAO Vienna/DM/ Österreichisches schwarzes Kreuz (ÖSK)	NO	-	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects Financial donations
Bahamas: 1/7/12	CWGC (Commonwealth War Graves Commission)	NO	-	Monitoring
Belarus: 1/1/15	DAO Minsk	NO	Installation of 1 WG; donation 2020 CZK 100,000 not refunded	Monitoring
Belgium: 9/61/62	DM/CWGC	NO	-	Monitoring
Bosnia and Herzegovina: 2/2/4	DAO Sarajevo	NO	Maintenance donation for WG: 2006–2017 CZK 303,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance

				Projects
Canada: 8/10/15	DAO Washington/ CWGC	NO	Renewal donation 1 WG: CZK 116,000	Monitoring Projects Financial donations
China: 1/1/55	DAO Beijing	NO	Installation 1 WG	Monitoring
Croatia: 8/8/14	DAO Bratislava/NGO/ private entities	NO	Maintenance donation WG: 2006–2018 – CZK 456,000	Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance
Egypt: 4/7/12	DAO Cairo/CWGC	NO	-	Monitoring
France: 48/592/ 983	DAO Paris/CWGC/ Ministry of the Armed Forces/NGO	NO	Renewal and reconstruction donation WG: 2007–2020 – CZK 1.8 M – 4 locations	Monitoring
Georgia: 1/1 /1	DAO Tbilisi	NO	-	Monitoring
Germany: 11/21/223	DAO Berlin/DM/ Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsor ge e.V.	NO	Since 2013 effort to relocate remains of 6 paratroopers	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Greece: 4/4/9	DAO Athens	NO	-	Monitoring
Hongkong: 1/1/1	DAO Beijing/DM/ CWGC	NO	-	Monitoring
Hungary: 9/30/70	DAO Bratislava/War graves Office MoD	NO	Renewal donation 1 WG: 2007 – CZK 140,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
India: 1/2/2	DAO Delhi	NO	-	Monitoring
Israel: 3/14/14	DAO Tel Aviv/ CWGC	NO	-	Monitoring Reconnaissance
Italy: 62/ 357/1345	Ministry of Defence – General commissioner/ DAO Athens/ Honorary consulate in Udine/NGO/ private entities	NO	Installation donation WG: 2021 CZK 500,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects Financial donations
Japan: 2 /2/6	DAO Hanoi/DM	NO	Installation donation 1 WG: 2015 CZK 520,000	Monitoring
Kazakhstan: 8/6/40	DAO Astana	NO	2023 administrative process launched for repair of WG	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects

				Financial donations
Kosovo: 1/1/2	DAO Tirana	NO	Reconstruction 1 WG: 2023	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Kyrgyzstan: 3/4/33	DAO Astana/DM	NO	-	Monitoring Projects
Lebanon: 2/ 2/2	DAO Damascus/CWGC/ Ministry of the Armed Forces	NO	-	Monitoring
Libya: 1/13/15	CWGC	NO	-	Monitoring
Luxembourg: 1/1/1	DM	NO	-	Monitoring
Moldova: 1/1/32	DAO Chişinău	NO	Renewal donation 1 WG: 2023 – CZK 500,000	Monitoring
Montenegro: 1/1/1	DAO Belgrade	NO	Reconstruction donation 1 VWG: 2016 CZK 50,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Netherlands: 18/28/53	DM/Oorlogs- gravenstichting (OGS)/CWGC	NO	Cooperation with OGS and CWGC to recover remains of 5 Czechoslovak airmen	Monitoring
North Macedonia: 2/3/7	DAO Belgrade/DM	NO	Reconstruction donations 1 WG: CZK 60,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Panama: 1/3/3	DM Bogota	NO	-	Monitoring
Philippines: 1/1/7	DM	NO	-	Monitoring
Poland: 78/529/2,089	DAO Warsaw/ Ministry of Culture/ voivodeship/ Instytut pamięci narodowej (IPN)	NO	Renewal, care and reconstruction donation: CZK 7.2 M	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects Financial donations
Portugal: 1/4/4	DM/CWGC	NO	-	Monitoring
Romania: 2/2/47	DM/National office of the memory of heroes	YES	Renewal and installation donations 2 WG: 2005, 2018 CZK 300,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Russia: 38/237/3454	DM/Ministry of Defence – Military Memorials Association/NGOs	YES	Care donation WG: 2007–2017 CZK 15 M, 15 locations	Monitoring
Serbia: 11/11/377	DAO Belgrade; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs/Ministry of Defence	YES	Renewal donation WG: 2013–2022 - CZK 586,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects

Singapore: 1/4/7	DAO Kuala Lumpur/CWGC	NO	-	Monitoring
Slovakia: 120/ 962/3 691	DAO Bratislava/ Ministry of the Interior/NGOs	YES	Renewal and reconstruction donation WG: 2010–2022 -CZK 7.4 M/ NGO EUR 150,196 / 23 locations	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Slovenia: 1/154/517	Ministry of Defence – War graves and cemeteries department/ NGOs/ private entities	YES	Renewal donation WG: 2006-2016 CZK 241,000	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Syria: 1/1/2	DAO Damaskus/CWGC/ Volksbund	NO	-	Monitoring Archive research
Türkiye: 1/1/1	DAO Ankara	NO	-	Monitoring
Ukraine: 57/14/2737	MA/ National Memory Institute Ukraine / National Intergovernmental Committee for the maintenance of memory of participants of counter-terrorist operations and victims of wars /NGOs/ Private entities	YES	Renewal donation WG: 2006–2020 - CZK 10.8 M; 2023 CZK 4.4 M, ViZa fund	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects Financial donations
United Kingdom: 121/396/640	DAO London/ CWGC/ Ministry of Defence	YES	Construction, renewal and maintenance of WG: 2006–2022 CZK 1.55 M	Priority Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects Financial donations
Uzbekistan: 8/18/965	DAO Astana/DM	NO	2023 administration process launched for construction of WG	Priority Archive research Monitoring Reconnaissance Projects
Yemen: 4/7/10	DM	NO	-	Monitoring

5. FINANCING

The MoD has efforts underway to provide care for war graves and veterans of war through grants and monetary donations on sustained basis. These activities are regulated under the law and supported by specific grant programs designed to preserve and restore historic values and traditions.

5.1 Historic values preservation and restoration programs

The provision of grants and monetary donations to ensure the care for war graves fulfils the long-term MoD objective “Ensuring the care for war veterans and care for war graves”. The provision of grants for the care for war graves is a Government function in accordance with Section 4 (3) d) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.

The funds for the care of war graves were provided from the state budget already during the First Republic²². From the mid-1920s, the budget of the then Ministry of National Defence – item Central War Graves Administration – planned funding divided as follows:

- Regular expenditures (war graves maintenance, upkeeping of cemeteries, monuments, walls, fences);
- Extraordinary expenditures (single grave tables, exhumation and war grave concentration, exhumation and transport of remains from foreign countries).

This was practised till 1939 and, following the war, until 1950, when the Government transferred the responsibility for war graves care from the Ministry of National Defence to the Ministry of the Interior. Before the passing of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., which entrusted the care for war graves into the remit of the Ministry of Defence, the Government endorsed the Resolution dated May 5, 1999, No. 427²³. On December 6, 1999, the Government of the Czech Republic endorsed the Resolution No. 1292 on the Principles for the provision and use of specific grants from the state budget for ensuring of care for war graves in the Czech Republic and monetary donations to foreign countries.

At present, the MoD provides specific grants to war grave owners for the provision of care for graves based on:

- Section 4 (3) d) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.²⁴,
- Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic dated May 5, 1999, No. 427/1999 on Ensuring the care for war graves in the Czech Republic and abroad.

²² General part of the explanatory memorandum on the Act No. 122/2004 Coll.

²³ On ensuring the care for war graves in the Czech Republic in the Czech Republic and abroad, which tasks the Minister of Defence to coordinate the care for war graves in the Czech Republic and abroad and secure for that purpose necessary funding in the MoD budget.

²⁴ The MoD provides grants in accordance with a dedicated regulation on the care for war graves to the owners of the war graves, and, if the WG owner is unknown, to the owner of the immovable property, where the WG is located.

The provision of grants observes:

- Act No. 218/2000 Coll., on Budgetary Principles and on the amendment to certain Acts (Budgetary Principles), as subsequently amended;
- Ordinance of the Ministry of Finance No. 560/2006 Coll., on the Involvement of the state budget in financing of the property reproduction programs.

The possibility of specific grants applies to all war graves registered as war graves with municipalities with extended powers in accordance with Section 4 (1) of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll. The provision of specific grants from the state budget for the care for war graves is decided by the grantor based on recommendation of the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Commission for War Graves.

Continuous care for war graves has been ensured since 2000 through the grant programs:

- Grant program 307440 “Preservation and restoration of historic values and military traditions”. 2000–2005;
- Grant program 207440 “Preservation and restoration of historic values and social prevention”. 2006–2007;
- Grant program 107440 “Preservation and restoration of historic values”. 2008–2010;
- Grant program 107190 “Preservation and restoration of historic values”. 2011–2020.

The program was designed for continuous care for war graves in the form of provision of specific grants to war grave owners in the territory of the Czech Republic and the provision of monetary donations for ensuring the care for Czechoslovak graves abroad.

5.2 Grants for the war graves care in the Czech Republic until 2020

The annual appropriation for the grants amounted to CZK 8 million. For 2014, the MoD increased the program funding by CZK 3.186 million. Given the progressive growth of the quantity of applications for the grant as well as increase of average costs of repairs and reconstruction of war graves, the program funding was increased to CZK 8.973 million in 2018. During the program effective period, the applicants for grants filed a total of 634 eligible applications²⁵. Out of the total number of filed applications, 309 were approved. So, 49 % of eligible applications were approved.

²⁵ Applications that contained all required information and requisites and were filed by January 31 of the year in which they were evaluated.

Eligible and approved applications – program 107190:

Applications	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
	Annually										
Filed	41	30	45	61	70	88	78	120	101		634
Approved	19	21	39	34	39	23	31	47	54	2	309
% Approved	4 %	70 %	87 %	56 %	56 %	26 %	40 %	39 %	55 %		49 %
	Program data – summary										
Filed	41	71	116	177	247	335	413	533	634	0	634
Approved	19	40	79	113	152	175	206	253	307	309	309
% Approved	46 %	56 %	68 %	64 %	62 %	52 %	50 %	47 %	48 %	0 %	49 %

The above table shows that the percentage of approved applications in the total summary from 2013 continuously dropped from 68% in 2013 to 49% in 2020. The drop was primarily caused by the growth of prices of labour and materials used in the care of war graves. During the program effective period, a total of 309 specific grants were provided in the total amount of CZK 84.239 million, while the requirement amounted to CZK 180.764 million. Since the funding in the program 107190 “Preservation and restoration of historic values” planned for 2011–2020 was used up, the program discharged grants filed by January 31, 2018. The funding was allocated under the program for 2019 and 2020, and, following the realisation of the activities, the program was closed.

5.3 Monetary donations abroad for the care for Czech war graves until 2020

The annual appropriation for monetary donations abroad amounted to CZK 4 million. During the program effective period, the increase was authorised of funding for ensuring the care for war graves as part of program financing for 2019 and 2020 to CZK 5 million. Since the funding under the program was used up, monetary donations to foreign countries were provided by the means of the follow-on program in 2020. In 2011-12, monetary donations abroad were provided through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 2012 on, monetary donations were transferred to recipients in countries where the MoD has Defence Attachés accredited through the Military Intelligence. In countries with non-resident Czech Defence Attachés, the monetary donations were transferred directly to the recipients.

Applications	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
	Annually										

Filed	6	5	8	4	7	7	7	8	4	0	56
Approved by Commission	5	2	7	4	5	7	7	8	4	0	49
Approved by the Government	5	2	7	4	3	7	7	8	3	0	46
Granted	5	2	4	4	3	7	7	7	3	0	42
Program data – summary											
Filed	6	11	19	23	30	37	44	52	56	0	56
Approved by Commission	5	7	14	18	23	30	37	45	49	0	49
Approved by Government	5	7	14	18	21	28	35	43	46	0	46
Granted	5	7	11	15	18	25	32	39	42	0	42

In the program effective period, a total of 42 monetary donations were transferred to 15 countries in the total amount of CZK 29.577 million.

5.4 Eligible activities not meeting the mandatory requirements

Since the non-investment program “Military traditions development” supported the “Legie 100” project, it was possible to secure funding of a part of the project that was relative to the war graves, commemorative sites and monuments to Czechoslovak legionnaires. In line with the program documentation, the following program parameters were expanded:

- CWGR application – expansion of the existing functionalities of the information system in the total amount of CZK 1.403 million;
- Acquisition of a new set of memorial plaques in the premises of the Military History Museum in the amount of CZK 0.491 million;
- Construction of a monument in Žižka barracks in Olomouc in the amount of CZK 0.621 million;
- Follow-on grant program 107290 “Preservation and restoration of historic values I”. 2020–2029.

5.5 Grants for care for war graves in the Czech Republic 2020

At present, grants are provided through the grant program no. 107290 “Preservation and restoration of historic values I”, which is open for 2020–2029. The process of development of the program documentation reflected the requirement to return the quantity of discharged applications above 60%. That value became the binding criterion for evaluating the program objective, meaning that if the discharged applications drop under 60%, the funding allocation would be reviewed. The annual appropriation for the grants was CZK 12 million. Based on the request by the grantor, the annual allocation for the provision of specific grants for ensuring the care for war graves in the territory of the Czech Republic has been increased to CZK 15 million since 2024. As part of the program 107290 “Preservation and restoration of historic values”, 417 eligible applications were filed in 2022-2024, of which 308 applications were discharged, which is 74 %. Thus, the program evaluation criterion is fulfilled²⁶.

Eligible and approved applications – program 107290:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Annually						
Eligible applications	68	71	84	88	106	417
Approved applications	43	50	60	73	82	308
% approved applications	63 %	70 %	71 %	83 %	77 %	74 %
Program data – summary						
Eligible applications	68	139	223	311	417	417
Approved applications	43	93	153	226	308	308
% approved applications	63 %	67 %	69 %	73 %	74 %	74 %

In the program effective period, 308 specific grants have been provided so far in the total amount of CZK 75.570 million, while the requirement amounted to CZK 134.688 million.

5.6 Monetary donations abroad for the care for Czech war graves from 2020

²⁶ Grants program 107290 “Preservation and restoration of historical values I”, point 7. Technical-economical rationale for the program objectives, program indicator.

The annual appropriation for the program amounted to CZK 5 million. Monetary donations continue to be transferred to recipients in countries where the MoD has Defence Attachés accredited through the Military Intelligence. In countries with non-resident Czech Defence Attachés, the monetary donations are transferred directly to the donation recipients.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Annually						
Filed	7	4	5	5	2	23
Approved by Commission	7	4	5	5	2	23
Approved by Government	8	4	4	5	-	21
Filed	6	4	4	2	-	16
Program data – summary						
Filed	7	11	16	21	23	23
Approved by Commission	7	11	16	21	23	23
Approved by Government	8	12	16	21	-	21
Granted	6	10	14	16	-	16

In the program effective period, 16 monetary donations have been transferred so far to 10 countries in the total amount of CZK 11.256 million.

5.7 CWGR application upgrade

In the program period, the amount of CZK 2 million was planned for an upgrade of the Central War Graves Registry (CWGR) application. The CWGR public portal no longer meets the needs of the requirements for working data and their presentation to the public especially in terms of using mobile devices in the field at the war graves and from the viewpoint of two-way communication between the user (website visitor) and the CWGR public portal, and public government authorities responsible for administering the registry of war graves at various levels of government. Nor does it conform with the existing security standards from the viewpoint of resilience to hacker attacks.

Based on the above, the existing module for the presentation of data through the CWGR public portal will be upgraded in 2025. The CWGR application upgrade seeks to redesign its public portal so that the module would offer to the public a presentation of data from the CWGR

application, Database of the Fallen and the Central War Graves Registry using a web browser and mobile application on current standards of displaying and information technology. The procurement will be performed through the MoD Armaments and Acquisition Division, the Land Forces and Communication and Information Systems Department. The subject of the order is an upgrade and expansion of the existing functionalities of the CWGR application. The budget allocation for the provision of the upgrade presently amounts to CZK 4.835 million.

5.8 Increase of funding for securing the care for graves

Because of the impossibility to discharge applications relative to the projects with a high funding requirement, the annual allocation for funding the care for war graves in the Czech Republic was increased to CZK 15 million from 2024. The 2025 allocation for securing the upgrade of the CWGR application was increased from CZK 2 million to CZK 4.835 million. The planning of further funding should reflect continuous increase of costs of maintenance and reconstruction of war graves, while there are growing requirements for the construction of new commemorative sites in home locations of individual units of the Czech Armed Forces and for funding repairs and renovations of war graves that are the property of the Czech Republic, and the MoD is authorised to manage the care for them. In the years ahead, we expect the number of war graves to grow, see 4.6.8 *Rise in the number of war graves*. Because of that, the annual allocation for funding the care for war graves in Czech Republic is requested to increase by CZK 5 million starting in 2026, so the total annual allocation is newly requested to amount to CZK 20 million. From 2028, the annual allocation for funding the care for war graves abroad is requested to increase by CZK 3 million, so the total annual allocation is newly requested at CZK 8 million.

Upon the closing of the existing program 107290 “Preservation and restoration of historical values I”, another increase of annual allocation to finance the care for war graves in the Czech Republic is requested by CZK 5 million from 2030, so the total annual allocation is newly requested at CZK 25 million.

Given the possible contracting of private archaeologic firms, see 4.6.6 *The use of archaeology*, it is possible to ensure an increase of funding in the scope of approximately CZK 1 million in the relevant budget section.

6. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND EDUCATION

The Section consistently engages in public relation activities to effectively increase awareness of issues of war graves and commemorative sites and promote their upkeep. We make use of public relations for building and developing relations with our partners in the Government, with Czech Embassies, and predominantly with our Defence Attachés. At the same time, we focus on interacting with the public, while we analyse the public attitude and seek to positively influence them. This activity is strategic and consistently planned; and involves informing and educating the public and seeking feedback. We actively engage both experts and the public. The key aspect of our strategy is two-way communication, which we sustain using public relations tool. This approach makes it possible for us to effectively administer social communication and control, which is critical for attaining our objectives in the domain of the care for war graves and commemorative sites.

We employ targeted campaigns, media outputs and education programs to address various segments of the public, from the youth through to specialist historians and ex service personnel. We use modern channels of communication, such as social media and websites to make our messaging widely accessible and current. Likewise, we organise events and meetings to share experience and deepen cooperation with our partners on national and international level. A critical part of our activities is also regular monitoring of assessment of effectiveness of our public relations strategies, which helps to respond swiftly to the changing needs and expectations of the public. That way we make sure that our efforts yield specific results in the form of increased interest in war graves and commemorative sites, their better maintenance and enhanced respect for the historic heritage they represent.

We also use public diplomacy to cater for negative influences, especially in averting attacks on the subject the Section pursues, and activities of the Section as such. Such communication involves reaction to defaming articles, fake representations and other forms of negative publicity. Public relations make it possible for us to respond to such situations, provide exact information and redress misconceptions of developed in the public and media. Public relations also serve as an important instrument for convincing relevant Government bodies. As part of our efforts to achieve amendment of the Act No. 122/2004 Coll., we employ strategic communication to attain legislation changes that foster our endeavour. By the same token, we initiate international agreements with new partners, for example with Germany, and revise the existing agreements with countries to better reflect current needs and objectives.

We do not omit the internal aspects of public relations. High quality building of our image positively influences the motivation of our staff and helps improve their performance. An established internal communication and positive public perception of the Section increases the work morale and promotes teamwork. In turn, that increases effectiveness and overall quality of the working outputs of the Section. Public relations have grown into a multifunction tool, which both protects and promotes our objectives, and indeed enhances internal cohesion and motivation of the team, which is essential for a successful performance in the long run.

6.1 Public relations tools

In the quest to inform and educate the public, one of our primary tasks is to effectively employ the tools for media relations, which involves building and cultivating relations with the journalists through whom we communicate with the media. Our objective is both to form the image of the Section as a responsible part of a Government institution, and indeed to communicate to the public the key messages concerning war graves care through information formats such as press releases, specialist articles, media briefings and press conferences.

From the broad variety of public relations tools, we seek to go ahead with the following specific communication options:

6.1.2 Media relations (media communication)

- press releases;
- press conferences;
- media outputs.

The Section employs the media relations strategy as a key tool for communication with the media and the public to provide relevant and important information on the activities of the Section and issues of war graves care. The first pillar are the press releases designed to systematically inform the media on important events, projects and initiatives associated with the care for war graves and commemorative sites. The Section engages in holding press conferences that serve as a platform for the presentation of key topics, answering media questions and support to media interactions. In addition, we focus on media outputs, such as interviews for radios, the TV or press, which the broader audience a greater insight into the complexity of care for war graves and commemorative sites.

6.1.3 Government relations (relations with Government institutions)

Systemic development of relations with relevant Government bodies is key for effective performance of our tasks and achieving the defined objectives. We engage in communication and cooperation with various Government institutions, which involves regular meetings, consultations and participation in joint projects.

Our activities include:

- **Strategic communication:** We engage in regular communication with Government bodies to the effect of ensuring coordination and harmonisation of our activities with Government policies and legislation requirements. Such communication comprises formal as well as informal channels including official discussions, e-mail correspondence and telephone consultations.
- **Cooperation on projects:** We are actively involved in joint projects with Government institutions, which focus on the protection and maintenance of war graves and commemorative sites. Joint projects allow us to share resources, expertise and experience, which generates a more effective and coordinated approach.
- **Legislation initiative:** Based on our body of expertise and experience, we are drafting amendments of legislation, which we submit to relevant Government bodies. We strive for an amendment of the existing Act No. 122/2004 Coll.
- **Participation in advisory bodies:** Our representatives are members of various advisory bodies and commissions, where they contribute to the development of implementation of policies relative to war graves and commemorative sites, which makes it possible for us to directly influence decision-making processes.
- **Mutual support and education:** We organise and are involved in various seminars, workshops and conferences designed to enhance mutual cooperation and information exchange with Government institutions and bodies.

Building on the development with Government bodies, our activities are in accordance with national priorities and legislation frameworks, which allows us to attain our objectives and provide high quality services to the public.

6.1.4 Public affairs (relations with non-profit organisations)

We have applied and cultivated relations on sustained basis with various institutions in the non-profit sector, which engage in care for war graves. Our long-standing experience in this domain have made it possible for us to build solid foundations for cooperation on both national and international level. It is through such cooperation that we intend to enhance our activities using

the exchange of experience and best practice with other institutions involved in the care for war graves in the international platform.

The key aspects of our approach to public affairs include:

- **International cooperative platform:** We are involved in an international platform that associates institutions and organisations engaging in the care for war graves. This platform offers a forum for sharing information, experience and best practices among the member organisations.
- **Exchange of lessons learnt and sharing best practice:** We participate in international conferences, workshops and seminars that serve for exchanging lessons learnt, successful projects and methods, which permits us to obtain new knowledge and inspire our future activities.
- **Joint projects and initiatives:** We are initiating and participating at joint projects with international partners, which focus on innovation in the care for war graves, improving technology and methods of maintenance and protection. Joint projects synergise efforts and rationalise spending.
- **Education and training programs:** We organise and participate in education program, that focus on improving the professional qualifications of our staff and partners.
- **Procedure standardisation and harmonisation:** we cooperate with international partners on standardisation and harmonisation of procedures and methodologies of care for war graves.
- **Publication and archive research:** we actively participate in archive research and publication of specialist methodologies that help develop the expertise and practical procedures in the domain of war graves care. The systematic archive research project named the War Graves Cadastre enables us to share our observations and products with the broader expert community.

We perform the above activities to increase the Section's awareness of latest trends and methods of caring for war graves and commemorative sites while contributing to the development of this domain on the international level.

6.1.5 Community relations (proximity communication)

The Section pursues an active communication using social media such as Facebook, X and Instagram, (YouTube in the future), and organises subject-matter projects and events.

Online communication through the social media:

- **Contact campaigns on social platforms:** We create contact campaigns on social media designed to address our target audiences and disseminate relevant information on our activities, events and important topics relative to war graves and commemorative sites. Those campaigns involve organic content, competitions and other interactive elements engaging our online community.
- **Social media as a means of dialogue:** Social media serve as a means of dialogue with our community. We are actively responding to comments, queries and suggestions of our followers and promote an open discussion on the topic of war graves and caring for them to build confidence and loyalty of our followers and strengthen relations with our online community.

Offline community events and projects:

- **Community meetings:** we plan to hold community meetings to furnish opportunities for personal interaction and discussion with the public.
- **Participative activities and projects:** We seek to engage the public in participative activities and projects that enable active participation and direct influence on our activities. Those may involve voluntary work in upkeeping of war graves, collection of historic data, current information on the condition of the war graves and commemorative sites or organising remembrance functions.

Goals and importance of community activities:

- Strengthening public awareness and understanding of care for war graves and commemorative sites;
- Building and sustaining confidence and loyalty of our community;
- Obtaining feedback and inputs for development of our activities;
- Strengthening togetherness and engagement of the public in the subject of war graves and their protection.

6.1.6 Public events

The Section is involved in organising cultural – commemoration, remembrance and education events to enhance awareness in the Government and amongst the public. These events serve for increasing awareness, education and engaging the public in the subject of care for war graves and commemorative sites.

Types of cultural and education activities:

- **Lectures and presentations:** we hold lectures and presentations on the history, importance of and current issues relative to war graves and commemorative sites. Such events are dedicated both to specialists and the public and offer various perspectives on the subject matter.
- **Webinars and online seminars:** in today's digital era, we also plan to organise webinars and online seminars for people to attend from the comfort of their homes. These interactive events furnish opportunities for deeper discussions and exchanges on current topics of war graves and caring for them.
- **Seminars and workshops:** seminars and workshops are designed for specialists, Government employees, the academia and other involved organisations. These events focus on detailed analysis and discussion of specific topics, methods and technologies in war graves care.

Goals and importance of cultural and education activities:

- Increasing awareness of history and importance of war graves and commemorative events;
- Sharing of specialist knowledge and information on the care and protection of war graves;
- Support of dialogue and mutual understanding among various stakeholders;
- Innovation and enhancement of working procedures and technologies in the care for war graves;
- Involvement of the public in activities associated with the care and protection of war graves and commemorative sites.

6.1.7 Publishing: we publish annual reports in Czech and English as the primary means of communicating our endeavour, achievements and other key information. The reports are available online at the Section's website. Besides publishing annual reports, we also plan to cooperate with the Military History Institute on preparing representative publications focused on prominent locations with Czech war graves in foreign countries.

Goals and importance of publishing:

- Inform the public about our activities and achievements;
- Preserve the historic memory;
- Increase awareness and educate the public on the importance of the care for war graves and commemorative sites.

6.1.8 Corporate identity and promotional items

Corporate identity is a key element for public perception of the Section and for building brand credibility and identity. We care for preserving a single corporate identity through consistent use of colour schemes, graphic elements and typography in our promotion materials. We prepare and distribute various information prints that are in line with our visual style and communication principles. Offline materials are a part of our PR campaigns that we design to address our target audiences and to strengthen awareness of the Section and its activities.

6.1.8.1 Corporate culture as a public relations tool: corporate culture plays a key role in public relations and significantly contributes to the achievement of our goals. A well-defined and actively advanced corporate culture improves internal communication and cooperation among employees, but it also positively shapes the perception of our Section by the public and by our partners.

Key aspects of the corporate culture include:

- **Values and mission:** Clearly defined values and mission which reflect our commitment to the protection of the war graves and commemorative sites, and which are shared and accepted by all staff. These values and mission are communicated both internally and externally for the public to understand our goals and principles.
- **Transparency and openness:** Supporting transparency and open communication within the Section as well as outside. We regularly inform the employees about important decisions and changes, which strengthen their engagement and confidence. We apply the same degree of transparency in the relation with the public, which increases our credibility.
- **Teamwork and collaboration:** Promoting teamwork and cooperation within the Section.
- **Professional development and education:** We invest into professional development of our employees by the means of education programs, academic training and seminars.
- **Acknowledgement and recognition:** we recognize and acknowledge the effort and achievements of our staff. Regular acknowledgement fosters a higher working morale and motivation, which positively reflects in the overall quality of our work.

- **Social responsibility:** we support and engage in many social responsibility activities that reflect our values and mission. That involves the care for war graves as well as the broader community and charity initiatives.

Implementation of corporate culture into the public relations:

- **Internal communication:** we actively support internal communication through regular meetings, internal bulletins and digital communication platforms, which ensure a high level of awareness and engagement among our teams.
- **External communication:** corporate culture is also communicated outside through our media outputs, websites and social media. We present our values and achievements, which enhances our positive image in the public.
- **Social events:** we organise and participate at remembrance functions and commemorative events that foster our corporate culture and enable us to share our values with the broader community.

The corporate culture both strengthens internal coherence and effectiveness of our team, and significantly contributes to the building of our positive image and achievements of our goals in the domain of public relations.

7. CONCLUSION

With the Act No. 122/2004 having been in power for twenty years, we are now at a critical phase, when we should redefine our tasks and goals, and react to the requirements of experts and the public as well as to the challenges arising from technology development. At the same time, we realise that war graves are not an exhausted subject belonging to history textbooks, but they do relate to the present and, as part of public diplomacy, they can be an important instrument of advancing Czech interests in foreign countries.

The present Concept is not intended to provide a detailed definition of individual objectives, but rather to outline out key priorities in the care for war graves. Those involve systemic archive research that could not be previously done in the required scope due to capacity reasons, and which is crucial for identification of new war graves. The second pillar is the development of memorial diplomacy with its potential to cultivate a positive image of the Czech Republic abroad. In this domain, we want to exercise an active approach to the countries with which we share the experience of war conflicts, but we have not established a closer cooperation so far.

Moreover, we expect the number of countries where we register our war graves to continue growing.

The Concept also covers the prepared upgrade of the public portal of the Central War Graves Registry, which will reflect the requirements of the public for searching for war graves and indeed their connection to the data on specific fallen soldiers and airmen including relevant preserved archive documents. We have communicated with the public using social media for more than a year.

The Concept's implementation will claim increased funding as well as qualified and motivated personnel to achieve the defined goals.

The Concept will be realised through individual tasks that will be presented for cooperation by the MoD and Armed Forces units and components. A comprehensive care for war graves however calls for an enhanced cooperation across Ministries, regional governments, municipalities and communities.

Acronyms

CWGR	Central War Graves Registry
CWGC	Commonwealth War Graves Commission
CRC	Czech Red Cross
DAO	Defence Attaché Office
EWHWG	European War Heritage Working Group
MoD	Ministry of Defence
WGWVD	War Graves and War Veterans Department
WVD	War Veterans Department
UINM	Ukrainian Institute of National Memory