



Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen
des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen
Deutschen Demokratischen Republik



Das
Bundesarchiv

The Future of the Stasi Records

**Joint concept of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi
Records and the Federal Archives for the permanent
preservation of the Stasi Records by transferring the Stasi
Records Archive into the Federal Archives**

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1. Introduction

In the winter of 1989/1990, brave citizens occupied the offices of the Ministry for State Security (MfS), thereby stopping the further destruction of documents and records. They were committed to preserving the documents and to making them accessible for the use of society. Making the Stasi Records accessible to the public was one of the central achievements of the Peaceful Revolution and German Unity.

The Stasi Records Act (StUG) created the legal foundation that, for the first time the world over, made it possible for citizens to gain access to the information that a secret police in a dictatorship had collected about them in violation of fundamental human rights. Furthermore, it created the conditions for the utilisation of the records of the State Security Service by public and non-public entities and for the purposes of historical, political and legal coming to terms with the past.

Over the past three decades, the work of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic (BStU) has become an important pillar in the endeavour to address the injustices of the SED-dictatorship (Socialist Unity Party of East Germany). Its legal foundation, the rule of law based access to the Stasi records, has become a worldwide model.

2. Mission and Goal of the Concept

In June 2016, the German Bundestag laid the cornerstone for future use of the Stasi Records with its resolution “Unwaveringly continuing reappraisal of the SED dictatorship” (Print Material 18/8705). With its decision to permanently preserve the entirety of all Stasi records and maintain the visibility of the Stasi Records Archive’s independence as an international model, the German Bundestag highlighted this use of the Stasi Records as a symbol of the Peaceful Revolution in East Germany (GDR) and the overcoming of the SED dictatorship.

The German Bundestag has instructed the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records to initiate the transformation process of the Stasi Records Agency from within the Office of the Federal Commissioner, charging him to work together with the Federal Archives to develop a plan for the permanent preservation of the Stasi Records by transferring the Stasi Records Archive to the Federal Archives.

The Federal Archives is legally mandated to secure and make usable the archives of the federal government in perpetuity. It sees itself as an integral part of a modern knowledge and information-based society, ensuring that the traces of human activity in essential areas of government and society are safeguarded, made usable, and passed on as far into the future as possible, enabling any component of society, from the nation as a whole to families and individuals, to remember.

In a democratic and liberal nation under the rule of law, this is achieved by the most comprehensive and neutral safeguarding possible, and by making the sources generally and publicly available for open-ended research and discursive interpretation of the past.

The Federal Archives is on the national level the institution that stores reliable and authentic records, classifies them, and makes them usable to society in accordance with the rule of law. This holds especially true in the digital world.

The holdings of the Federal Archives include more than 60 kilometres of files from the GDR's government agencies and from East German political parties and mass organisations. Aside from being an important source of information for research, scholarship, and the media, they also serve to help victims of the SED dictatorship to prove the injustice suffered and enable them to make legal claims.

As a part of the Federal Archives, the Stasi Records will be even better integrated into the structures for preserving our nation's written cultural heritage, and thus embedded in the complete written records of the overall history of the GDR can even better contribute to a lasting social and scholarly examination of the SED dictatorship.

Having worked together for many years, the BStU and the Federal Archives now present a joint concept to show how integrating the Stasi Records Archive into the structures of the Federal Archives can better meet the great future challenges of preserving the Stasi Records for the long term, securing the information they contain, digitisation, and dealing with the changing demands that society will have of the archives.

One foundation for this concept is the previous decades of work of the BStU, presented in the regular activity reports to the German Bundestag (*see especially the 14th BStU Activity Report for 2017 and 2018*).

The concept is based on the guidelines formulated in the aforementioned German Bundestag resolution. Questions about the consequences for the office of the Federal Commissioner not concerning the transfer of the Stasi Records Archive to the Federal Archives are not part of the mandate for preparing the concept and must be considered separately.

The Federal Commissioner and the Federal Archives campaign for timely decisions from the German Bundestag so that the necessary investments can be made for the permanent safeguarding of the Stasi Records.

3. The Stasi Records Archive as Part of the Federal Archives

3.1 Legal Framework

The legal foundation for the BStU's activities to date has been the Stasi Records Act (StUG). It contains the regulations for compiling and using the Stasi Records, and provisions about the responsibilities and organisation of the BStU as an agency.

Facing a future changed institutional framework, changes in the StUG are necessary which however must comply with the Bundestag resolution identifying "*retention of the Stasi Records Act with its special legal provisions*" as a condition for transferring the Stasi Records Archive to the Federal Archives.

The Federal Archives Act (BArchG) must be amended accordingly.

3.2 Organisation

With responsibility for the Stasi Records transferred to the Federal Archives, a new separate division will be created with a special leadership under the name “Stasi Records Archive.” This organisational unit will carry out the special responsibilities of today’s BStU. The administration and interdisciplinary archival tasks will be integrated into already existing, corresponding organisational structures of the Federal Archives. Synergetic effects will be facilitated in the crucial areas of digitisation and preservation of the holdings. This should yield a substantial quality improvement for conservation and accessibility of the Stasi Records. The number of staff remains unaffected by this.

Further, it will be possible to place personnel recruitment and development on a much broader footing once the Stasi Records Archive has been integrated into the Federal Archives. The BStU and Federal Archives already work together training specialist personnel. This can be advanced and consolidated. Exchanging personnel between the Stasi Records Archive and other areas of the Federal Archives opens up more development opportunities for personnel. This would facilitate sharing staff expertise and experiences between the archives, further intensifying professional exchange.

The Federal Archives can set up an advisory body that supports the work of the Stasi Records Archive.

3.3 Permanent Preservation of the Archival Collection, Digitisation

The Federal Archives’ expertise, technology, and the many years of experience in questions of archival-appropriate integration of the Stasi Records Archive can be consolidated under the auspices of the Federal Archives.

The holdings of the Stasi Records Archive are currently housed in the central headquarters in Berlin Lichtenberg and in twelve additional locations in the East German Federal States. The Stasi Records Archive contains a total of about 111 kilometres of Stasi files, around 1.8 million photographic documents, and around 2,800 film recordings. The state of conservation ranges from merely satisfactory, to precarious, to poor – the result of prior damage from daily use by the State Security Service and inadequate storage. The extant documents held in the Stasi Records Archive consist mainly of low-quality acidic paper that has been subjected to the physical stress of intensive use over many years.

Additional comprehensive conservation and restoration measures are required to ensure the preservation and usability of the documents for as long as possible. This includes preventative measures, such as transferring all paper-based documents into acid-free archival containers (folders and cardboard boxes) and storing in appropriately climate-controlled depots, as well as measures such as deacidification to preserve those documents particularly threatened by decay. To this end, the BStU is currently developing a concept for a range of measures in line with the technical principles of the Federal Archives. The focus of this concept is on classification of the holdings according to damage profiles and prioritising conservation on the basis of the following criteria: level of threat, importance, and use of the respective partial holdings. The expertise of the Federal Archives in questions of conservation and restoration will be used to further develop this concept.

The prerequisite for successfully and sustainably preserving the holdings is that the documents are stored in a manner compatible with archiving. Since its founding, the BStU used former MfS properties and other buildings that were readily available during the time of its founding. The focus when selecting the properties was not on archival aspects, such as document preservation, but instead on the speedy commencement of work. Shortcomings have been reduced since then, yet only the archive building in Berlin offers the necessary requirements for permanent storage, and this only to a limited extent. Of the twelve other locations, only the one in Halle has air conditioning in the archival spaces. However, the site in Halle is located in a flood hazard zone and was affected by the flooding in 2013.

The German Bundestag's decision to permanently preserve the entire holdings by transferring the Stasi Records Archive to the Federal Archives laid the foundation for necessary investments in archival-appropriate storage of the documents by way of renovation, extension or new construction of archive buildings (*see Section 4. Locations of the Stasi Records Archive*).

A central component of the strategy for making the Stasi Records Archive viable for the future is the rapid digitisation of files, photos, audio recordings, and film materials. This serves to preserve the originals because the provision of digital copies means the originals can be protected from further damage through repeated use. It also records the information if it proves impossible to permanently preserve the originals materials, especially film and audio recordings.

At the site of Stasi Records Archive location in Berlin Lichtenberg the Federal Archives will set up a workshop and digitisation centre to improve conservation and restoration work and to digitise the Stasi Records.

An additional goal of digitisation is to improve accessibility and usability for the records. Digitisation can considerably accelerate the processes of cataloguing, creating finding aids, locating information, providing the records, and it means that viewing of Stasi records is no longer tied to specific locations. Last but not least, digitisation can considerably increase the visibility of an institution and thereby strengthen public awareness of it, for instance within the scope of its internet presence.

3.4 Cataloguing and Reconstruction of the Records, Source Research

The mission of the Stasi Records Archive is to ensure the best possible usability of the records of the Ministry for State Security of the GDR. The focus for this are the roughly 111 kilometres of written materials.

These records essentially consist of two types of written materials: firstly, the documents from the individual service units still in use at the time of the dissolution of the State Security Service; and secondly, the materials that had already been archived by the MfS. Both types of documents have been safe-guarded in the same quantity. The documents that were being circulated in the service units until the dissolution of the MfS were received mainly in an unorganised manner. Their thematic and name-based cataloguing is well advanced in the Stasi Records Archive.

The files archived by the MfS can predominately be searched by name due to their origin as working tools for secret police procedures. Thematic cataloguing has been carried out only to a limited extent thus far.

While name-based researching options are largely suited for individuals affected by Stasi activity viewing their personal files, thematic research for requests by research, education and media requires specialist knowledge.

To strengthen the service character of the Stasi Records Archive for research, education, and media, the Stasi Records Archive will focus on thematic cataloguing of the files archived by the MfS. This will further improve the possibilities for independent, topic-related research by researchers, educators and media professionals.

The context in which the materials were created and their possible meanings will be rendered more transparent through an intensive generation and publication of finding aids. This creates a specific, structural access that is especially adapted to these archival materials.

To meet the demands of a changing scholarly landscape, and building on the basic research undertaken at the BStU to date, research at the Stasi Records Archive will be further developed in the direction of targeted source research.

This will enhance the understanding of the character and the internal structures of the Stasi Records Archive's holdings – which even today are sometimes difficult for outsiders to comprehend – more understandable. The editing of the historical sources should make better orientation possible for all users. This will be specifically reinforced by developing and publishing editions, reports and research guidelines.

The resources available to the Stasi Records Archive in the academic field will be used in order to fulfil these tasks.

The Stasi Records Archive will seek to cooperate with research institutions such as universities, non-university research institutions, and memorial sites and foundations in a variety of ways to cultivate scholarly exchange.

The future service-oriented source research at the Stasi Records Archive is intended to make a significant contribution to the strengthening and continuation of the contemporary historical research into the SED dictatorship.

Under the auspices of the Federal Archives, especially in the field of the publication of editions, corresponding documents from the parallel heritage of records about the GDR can be used to enable deeper insights into the power mechanisms and interdependencies of the various institutions of the former GDR.

Building on experiences with the online finding aid-platform ARGUS (archival records search), jointly used by the Federal Archives and the BStU, cataloguing documents and creating and publishing finding aids for national and international archive portals can be more closely interlinked than before as the two institutions move forward under a common roof. This is facilitated by the use of BASYS plus the Invenio presentation platform. BASYS is the Federal Archives' own archive management system, in use and continually refined for the

past 25 years. Along with the professional management of the archival materials, BASYS opens up myriad possibilities for preparing and presenting cataloguing data and digitised copies across all of the holdings.

By introducing BASYS to the Stasi Records Archive, the individual databases pertaining to the MfS material (including directives and commands) and other East German state organisations at the BStU will be converted into a uniform system for cataloguing and releasing files. Furthermore, over the long term, the metadata for digital copies will be managed in BASYS, and interfaces will set up digital depots and archives to further simplify their use.

There are also approximately 16,000 sacks of documents that were torn up by the State Security stored in the Stasi Records Archive. The reconstruction and cataloguing of torn documents will be continued in the Federal Archives. This reconstruction will continue both by hand and virtually using a scan and puzzle technology developed by the Fraunhofer Institute for Production Systems and Design Technology. The reconstruction is being used as an accompanying cataloguing tool.

3.5 Use of the Records, Consultation

The use of the Stasi Records by citizens, by public and non-public entities, by researchers and the media, and for all other purposes defined by the StUG will continue to be guaranteed when the Stasi Records Archive is integrated into the Federal Archives.

The comprehensive consultation for users personally viewing the files, a necessary consequence due to the sensitive nature of the information contained in the documents, will also continue to be guaranteed when the Stasi Records Archive is brought under the auspices of the Federal Archives.

The range of services for users will be further improved. In the future, responses to user requests for records from the Stasi Records will also include relevant files from the Federal Archives. For victims of the SED dictatorship, these are especially prison files from the Federal Archive that are of particular importance for rehabilitation proceeding according to the Communist Injustice Indemnification Law

The use of documents by public and non-public entities – i.e., for purposes of rehabilitation and compensation, for matters of bestowal of medals, and for purposes of vetting civil servants, and for people with special responsibilities (for instance parliamentary representatives, judges, or employees of institutions for coming to terms with the past) – will also continue under the auspices of the Federal Archives.

For users from the areas of research and the media, the common roof offered by the Federal Archives makes their work easier since the Federal Archives holdings that relate to the GDR will be collected within one institution, and research, use of advisory services, and requests to view records will all take place at a central location.

Further developing the Stasi Records Archive under the auspices of the Federal Archive will focus especially on providing end-to-end digital processes for fulfilling requests, from receiving to initiating and evaluating research, depot requests, digital reading and

anonymization, to providing information. In the future, all users – whether in the area of viewing personal files, for researchers and the media as well as for public authorities – will have the opportunity to be able to retrieve their documents over the internet. Procedures for this will take into account the requirements of data protection.

3.6 Public Communication

Public communication will be an important element of the visibility of the Stasi Records Archive under the roof of the Federal Archives. The public offerings will focus on conveying the special character and the symbolic value of the Stasi Records Archive as the legacy of a dictatorship's secret police, and the archive's contents and its current uses for society as an achievement of the Peaceful Revolution.

The Stasi Records Archive preserves a unique written cultural heritage that is seen as a monument of a surveillance state. With its educational and exhibition offerings, the Stasi Records Archive contributes to raising the profile of archives as a place of learning, particularly at the historic sites of the SED dictatorship. In addition to educational offerings for students at all levels, the Stasi Records Archive also offers tours through the archive, exhibitions, and events.

The information offerings are especially intended as a bridge to younger generations who had no experiences of their own with the SED dictatorship and the era of the partition of Germany. They are intended to encourage discussion about the power mechanisms and everyday life in the SED dictatorship and contribute to raising awareness about the value of freedom and human rights. All information offerings will be supported with appropriate scientific and scholastic research.

As part of a framework of cooperation and division of labour, the information offerings will be coordinated with the activities of the local memorial sites and other institutions whose mission is coming to terms with the SED dictatorship (*see Section 4. Locations of the Stasi Records Archive*).

Digital offerings play a particularly important role in the Stasi Records Archive's strategy for public communication. Low-threshold offerings such as the "Stasi Media Centre" for example, create a "window into the archive" that serves as a guidepost to additional documents and that awakens interest in doing further research on one's own.

The Stasi Records Archive will continue to contribute to Germany's international relations in the future with its specific expertise in a society's use and reappraisal of information collected in violation of human rights and will continue to contribute to the *European Network of Official Authorities in Charge of the Secret Police Files*.

Under the auspices of the Federal Archives, corresponding documents from the parallel heritage of records about the GDR can be used to an even greater extent than before, for both digital offerings and also in the area of archival education. This will afford users of these services even deeper insights into the power mechanisms of the GDR and further strengthen public understanding about the importance of archives.

4. Locations of the Stasi Records Archive

4.1 Berlin Lichtenberg

On the premises of the former Stasi headquarters a new archive centre about the SED dictatorship will be built. Alongside the Stasi Records it will contain the holdings of the central GDR authorities, the SED archive and those of mass organisations of the GDR, and the library of the Foundation Parties and Mass Organisations of the GDR, the core of which comprises the library of the former Institute for Marxism-Leninism.

In addition, using the expertise of specialist staff, the archive centre will offer restoration and digitisation workshops to better meet the challenges of long-term preservation and contemporary use of the documents. The reading rooms allow users to view the Stasi Records and further GDR archive holdings from the Federal Archives in one location.

The presence of the Stasi Records Archive at the historic location of the former Stasi headquarters is an important cornerstone in the development of the premises into a place of *“Reflection On Dictatorship and Resistance”* (see *Bundestag resolution Print Material 18/8705*).

Next to the planned archive centre on the SED-dictatorship with the special holdings of the Stasi Records Archive already on location, additional groups are also contributing to the historic site: The Stasi museum, the Robert Havemann Society with the open-air exhibition *Peaceful Revolution and Fall of the Wall* as well as the archive of the GDR Opposition, and victims’ associations and civil-society stakeholders in House 1, the former office of the Minister for State Security Erich Mielke at the former Stasi headquarters.

The Federal State of Berlin also supports the development of the former Stasi headquarters as a *“Place of remembrance, commemoration, historical research, and political education”* with the Berlin House of Representatives’ resolution *“Getting the campus for democracy in Lichtenberg off the ground”* (Print Material 18/0916).

The many years of work by these aforementioned institutions and the existing cooperation between the stakeholders help form the foundation for future developments. A meaningful division of labour and cooperation between the stakeholders serves to increase the profile of the Stasi Records Archive and the significance of its location in the former Stasi headquarters. Taking into account this plural structure of support and agents on the premises, which has grown over the years, the former State Security officers’ mess hall in Building 22 will be developed from the current information centre into a cross-institutional visitor’s centre.

4.2 East German Federal States

The BStU currently has twelve regional offices in the capitals of the former GDR districts. The holdings of the respective MfS district offices are housed in the regional offices.

It is necessary to cluster the archival locations in the Federal States in order to finance the investments in archival-appropriate storage of the documents by way of renovation, extension or new construction of archive buildings (see *Section 3.3 Permanent Preservation of the Archival Collection*).

The future regional structure of the Stasi Records Archive plans for an archive location in each of the East German Federal States. Full information services, consultation services, requests to view records, and viewing of records will be available to citizens, even at those regional office locations which will in the future lack a purpose-built archive.

There will be a review for selecting and designing the future archive locations for the Stasi Records with consideration of the following criteria:

- Archive-appropriate document storage
- Efficient working structures in archiving and administration
- Use of the historical locations in the education and communication of the history
- Integration into the regional landscape of memorial sites, educational institutions, research facilities and other archives
- Regional presence and responsiveness for citizens

In addition, the Federal Commissioner has communicated with representatives of the Federal State governments about questions of developing the structure of the regional offices. The Federal State governments regard the Stasi Records that were created within the territories of their states as outstanding cultural assets, and their public use today a symbol of the Peaceful Revolution. Integrating the archive sites into the regional commemorative and memorial landscapes is of central importance for the Federal State governments.

To ensure that future decisions about the archive locations of the Stasi Records Archive can be made on a solid foundation, the BStU has asked the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media to have the Institute for Federal Real Estate (BImA) to examine the specific suitability of real estate and properties via feasibility studies, and these procedures have already been initiated.

Berlin, 13 March 2019

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