



Federal Commissioner for the Records
of the State Security Service of the former
German Democratic Republic

Stasi Records Archive



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Democracy, not Dictatorship



p. 4: Demonstration on 7 October 1989 in Berlin (East), photo: Andreas Schoelzel | p. 5: photo: BStU/Mulders

A symbolic archive. For almost 30 years the Stasi Records Archive is representative of a unique event: It was the first time that the files of a secret police were made accessible to the very citizens that had been subjected to surveillance. For the first time citizens were able to obtain extensive access to the information collected about them by the state in violation of human rights. What began as an emancipatory act during the Peaceful Revolution ultimately made it possible for millions to discover the truth about their own fate, but also about those responsible for the violation of rights in the dictatorship.

A contemporary archive. Access to the Stasi files strongly contributed and still contributes to a social discourse about past injustices, about the power mechanisms of dictatorships and about individual responsibility. A discourse that often serves as a reflection of challenges faced today. And a discourse that turned the archive into an international model.



A human rights archive. In contributing to the clarification of how the SED functioned for 40 years, the Stasi Records Archive raises awareness about how we shape society today. What are the values we want to live by? How can we protect the rights of individuals? The mechanisms of secrecy, the systematic denial of rights, the ease with which people are misled – all of this is documented by the Stasi files. The archive therefore also addresses the issue of human rights.

The better we understand dictatorship, the better we can shape democracy.

ROLAND JAHN
Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU)

Stasi Records Archive



Records of unofficial collaborators (IM files) in the archive, photo: BStU/Morgenstern

History of the Records

The Stasi records document the work of the GDR Ministry for State Security (MfS), also known as the Stasi.

The Stasi was a secret police, an investigative agency and a foreign intelligence service all at the same time. It was disempowered by GDR citizens during the Peaceful Revolution in autumn 1989.

Since 3 October 1990, the information and records collected and archived by the Stasi have been made accessible by the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records (BStU) in the Stasi Records Archive.

The headquarters of the BStU is located in Berlin. It also maintains regional offices in twelve former district capitals of the GDR: Chemnitz, Dresden, Erfurt, Frankfurt (Oder), Gera, Halle, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Neubrandenburg, Rostock, Schwerin and Suhl. There are advisory offices in Potsdam and Cottbus. Irrespective of where they live, citizens can submit a request to view records or read their own files in any of these offices. Special events and exhibitions are also open to the general public. The BStU employs 1,522 people at 14 locations (as of 1 January 2018).

For more information about the work of the BStU, visit www.bstu.de.



The Archive

More than 111 kilometres of documents are available for research in the BStU archive. Fifty-one kilometres of this material was archived by the Stasi and indexed by name. An additional 60 kilometres of unsorted material was found in the offices of the Stasi in 1990. Archivists have been going through the heaps of material bit by bit. They have already indexed 91% of these documents (as of July 2018).

The holdings of Stasi Records Archive are dispersed across 13 different locations. Ca. 43 kilometres of more than 111 total kilometres of preserved Stasi records came from the ministry in Berlin. The remaining ca. 68 kilometres of existing material came from the Stasi district administrations.

The Archive in Numbers

Documents: **111** “linear kilometers”

filmed documents: **the equivalent of 47** “linear kilometers”

File cards: **41** million

Photos, photo negatives, slides: **1.8** million

Audio recordings: **23,700**

Film and videos: **2,866**

Fragmented material: **15,500** bags

Viewing Files



The Stasi records can be viewed in the reading room, photo: BStU

Viewing One's Personal File

Everybody has the right to view the documents containing the information the MfS collected about them. Under certain conditions, relatives may also view the files on a deceased or missing family member.

To ensure that unauthorised persons do not gain access to personal files, it is necessary to provide both a signature and identity confirmation. The latter can be issued at the BStU offices upon presentation of a valid ID. For applications sent by mail, the confirmation can be provided by the local registry office.

To submit a request online, you must have:

- a new identity card or an electronic residency permit which contains an activated online identification function
- a card reader to read the identification
- the AusweisApp2 (versions from November 2014 or later).

Use by Public and Non-Public Offices

On the request of public and non-public offices, the BStU will disclose whether evidence exists to suggest that certain individuals in important social and political positions previously cooperated secretly with the Ministry for State Security. It is the responsibility of the requesting office to decide whether the examination should be carried out and what consequences are to be drawn.

The BStU also provides information for rehabilitation and restitution claims and for criminal investigations or to prevent external threats. Additionally, it processes requests regarding unresolved property claims, pensions of former MfS employees and medal awards.



Using Records for the Purpose of Research, Media and Civic Education

Researchers, media representatives and civic education institutions also have the right to view records. In this way, the BStU assists people working to reappraise the Stasi's historical and political impact. When requested, the BStU will provide records concerning the activities of the MfS and the power mechanisms in both the former GDR and the Soviet zone of occupation. The BStU will also support research on the Nazi past by providing documents from the Third Reich that the Stasi used for its own purposes.

Research conducted in the Stasi Records Archive contributed to the production of many documentary films, scholarly publications, feature films and television series. These include *The Lives of Others*, *Gundermann* and *Weissensee*.

A request form for researchers, media representatives and civic education institutions is available on the BStU website (www.bstu.de).

Requests in Numbers 1990–2017

Requests for information, viewing files and releasing copies of documents:	3.21 mio.
Requests for purposes of research, media and civic education:	34,400
Petitions concerning rehabilitation, compensation, criminal investigations:	508,000
Petitions to vet civil service employees:	1.76 mio.
Petitions to examine people in important functions and other requests:	234,000
Petitions regarding security and background checks:	260,000
Petitions regarding pension claims:	1.17 mio.
Total:	7.17 mio.

Information about the Stasi



Walk-in files in the exhibition "Access to Secrecy," photo: BStU/Mulders

Access to Secrecy. Exhibition about the Stasi Records Archive

Why and how did the secret police of the GDR collect, store and process all this information? Why do the files still exist today? What do they contain and what can they show? How are they kept and how does society use them? The permanent exhibition "Access to Secrecy" at the historical site of the Ministry for State Security provides answers. Visitors can discover the archive via original objects, historical photos and film clips as well as interactive media stations.

A highlight of the exhibition are monumental walk-in files documenting individual stories. They reveal the impact of surveillance on the people being watched. Visitors also have the opportunity to engage with selected Stasi documents and learn more about the methods and work of the Stasi.

"Access to Secrecy" is a permanent exhibition that invites individuals to explore the stock rooms of the archive and become acquainted with the documents left behind by the Stasi. It is open to individual exploration but also offers guided tours which can include the actual archives. The exhibition, which covers four floors, explains the origin of the documents and the work of the Stasi officers. It also highlights the challenges facing the archive today.

*"House 7", Ruschestraße 103, 10365 Berlin
Hours: Mo–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat, Sun 11am–6pm
Admission is free.
www.einblick-ins-geheime.de*



Visitors in the "Mielke Suite" in the Stasi Museum at the former Stasi headquarters in Berlin-Lichtenberg, photo: BStU/Dresen

Permanent Exhibition in the Stasi Museum

The headquarters of the Stasi was located on 22 hectare of grounds in Berlin-Lichtenberg from 1950 to 1989. "House 1," where Minister Erich Mielke had his offices, formed the central area of the complex. Today it houses the Stasi Museum.

The exhibition "State Security in the SED Dictatorship," created jointly by the BStU and ASTAK association (Antistalinistische Aktion e.V.), describes the structure and methods of the MfS. It shows the actual people who worked within the apparatus, who took concrete actions and made decisions. Hundreds of thousands of people worked for the MfS as official employees or unofficial collaborators. How did they come to join the Stasi, what career paths did they take, what was their social and professional background and what kind of work did they do for the Stasi?

The "Mielke Level," which includes the original offices of the Minister for State Security and his staff, is part of the exhibition.

*"House 1," Ruschestraße 103, 10365 Berlin
Hours: Mon-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat, Sun and holidays 11am-6pm
Admission: 6 €, reduced 4.50 €, pupils 3 €
www.stasimuseum.de*

Travelling and Temporary Exhibitions

The BStU has several exhibitions that provide information on the development and structure of the GDR secret police and describe its methods of surveillance and persecution. The travelling exhibition "Feind ist, wer anders denkt" (The Dissenter is the Enemy) is presented mostly in the former West Germany. Exhibition elements can be added to make the content relevant to the local public and to show the Stasi's spying activities in the respective region.

"The Stasi" is a modular exhibition system that offers a large selection of themes: depending on the occasion and available space, a suitable exhibition can be assembled from a pool of more than 110 modules on regional issues, events and biographies.



School Programs

The Stasi Records Archive helps educate about dictatorships and democracy through teacher seminars and student projects in the Stasi headquarters' learning centre. The modules for project days include primary source material from the Stasi, programs offered by the Stasi museum and the exhibition "Access to Secrecy" in the Stasi Records Archive. The historical outdoor grounds are also integrated into project days. The education staff provides material designed especially for schools. The source material provides examples of teenagers who were persecuted by the Stasi, young people who became Stasi informers, and official Stasi employees performing their routine work. More information and the materials are available online at www.bstu.de/informationen-zur-stasi/bildungsangebote.

Events

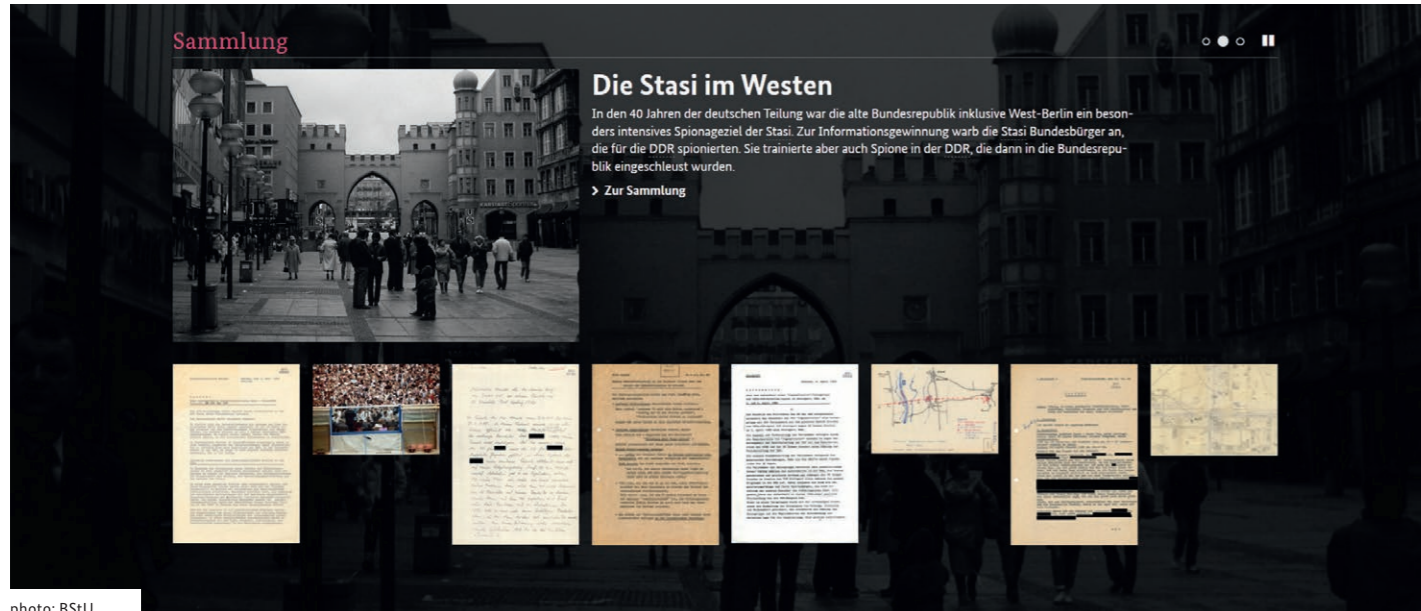
The BStU encourages a lively exchange of ideas on subjects such as surveillance, repression, civil courage and resistance. More than 200 events take place each year, often in cooperation with other institutions addressing with historical issues.

Internet

The BStU website www.bstu.de aims to spark interest in historical and political education in many different ways. The site offers an overview of service and information resources provided by the BStU as well as specialised topics on the Stasi. An events calendar shows the events and exhibitions taking place throughout Germany.

The website offers many different ways to research the Stasi records. Key documents are published in source material collections that contain information on the status, tasks and methods of the MfS. At www.bstu.de there is an overview of all the BStU publications, some of which can be downloaded online. The site also offers information and guidelines on how to use the Stasi records and how to submit a request to view files. The request form is available on the website as a download.

A search on the website will also include results from the online Stasi Media Centre and the holdings overview of the Stasi Records Archive that are also available on the Federal Archives platform ARGUS.



Stasi Media Centre

The Stasi Media Centre is an online window into the Stasi Records Archive. Thousands of pages of documents, hundreds of photo series, and many hours of audio and video material provide an in-depth view of the methods and activities of the Stasi.

The Stasi Media Centre invites the public to make its own impression of the material left behind by the Ministry for State Security (MfS). Accompanying texts and an explanation of terms help make the complex content more comprehensible.

The Media Centre contains general documents and clear case studies. It provides an overview of the activities, structure and development of the Ministry for State Security throughout the 40 years of the SED dictatorship.

An intuitive website design allows for both a rational and emotional approach to the content. All media can be explored in full text through a word-based search. Collections arranged by topic provide a straightforward view of events and personal fates. They show how the Stasi intervened in the lives of the people in the GDR.

The Stasi Media Centre can be accessed from a desktop computer as well as from tablets and smartphones.

www.stasi-mediathek.de



The library of the Stasi Records Archive is open to the public, photo: BStU/Mulders

Research

The Stasi documents provide a broad range of source material for research into the structures, operating mechanisms, mentalities, work methods and historic impact of the GDR secret police. The historians working at the BStU conduct basic research and publish numerous studies and primary source editions.

In addition to several monographs, there are a few key publications worthy of special note: the MfS lexicon and the handbook “Anatomie der Staatssicherheit,” which both provide well-grounded information about the MfS; and the ZAIG volume of documents, a collection of reports sent by the MfS to the SED leadership.

These publications can be purchased through the BStU, the internet or bookstores, and are also available in the BStU library. Many of these publications can be downloaded for free from the BStU homepage: www.bstu.de

Library

The library of the Stasi Records Archive is a specialized library. It contains publications on subjects relevant to the reappraisal of the GDR state security service. The reference library supports the work of the Stasi Records Archive, but is also open to all individuals interested in this subject.

In addition to books, the library’s holdings, most of which are freely accessible, include journals, newspapers and numerous audio-visual media (CD, DVD and CD-ROM). The library maintains a large archive of German-language newspapers.

Karl-Liebknecht-Str. 31/33, 10178 Berlin

Hours: Mon, Tues, Thurs 9am–4pm, Wed 9am–6pm, Fri 9am–2:30pm

Stasi Headquarters. Campus for Democracy



Public events are held regularly on the grounds of the former Stasi headquarters, photo: BStU/Hensel

The headquarters of the Ministry for State Security in Berlin-Lichtenberg was a giant compound including some 50 buildings, thousands of offices and housing up to 7.000 of the ministry's employees. Closed off to the public the restricted area spanned more than two square kilometres. Today, the core of the former bastion of the secret police is an educational site about dictatorship, resistance and democracy.

It was from this historical site that the employees organised the surveillance and repression of the GDR population in an effort to secure the SED's power. This effort included a vast foreign espionage operation that was also carried out from the Lichtenberg headquarters.

In January 1990, GDR citizens forced their way onto the grounds and helped put a stop to the activities of the Stasi and the destruction of documents.

The historical site has since acquired new significance: The former Stasi complex has become a "Campus for Democracy." A site that for decades stood for repression is now setting new accents, becoming a place to reflect on the social dynamic between dictatorship and democracy. Both the Stasi Records Archive and the Robert Havemann Society's Archive of the GDR Opposition are located here. Exhibitions, school programs, tours and public events foster a reappraisal of history and an active discussion about dictatorship and democracy.

Reconstruction



Torn documents stored in bags, photo: BStU/Dresen

Reconstruction of Torn Documents

During the Peaceful Revolution of 1989/90, the MfS tried to destroy or make unusable as many documents as possible to cover up evidence of its actions. GDR citizens stormed the Stasi offices and were able to stop the destruction. What remained were thousands of bags containing torn documents.

In 1995, work began to put the fragmented documents back together by hand. So far, ca. 1.6 million pages of documents contained in 500 bags have been manually reconstructed. In 2007 the German Bundestag agreed to fund a pilot project that would use computers to speed up the reconstruction process. The Fraunhofer Institute for Production Systems and Design Technology (IPK) was commissioned to develop software that would be able to reassemble the fragments on the basis of similar features such as torn edges, colour and hand-writing.

More than 90,000 pages have already been reconstructed using the “ePuzzler,” which began functioning in late 2013. However the test phase showed that reassembling documents on a mass scale is not yet feasible. For the procedure to work, a new scanning technology has to be applied. The German Bundestag made additional funds available for

this in 2015. In the future the BStU and Fraunhofer IPK will carry out a virtual process based on the principle of “accompanying development,” which will focus less on quantity and more on content. At the same time, minimally torn documents will continue to be reconstructed manually.

The reconstructed documents showed how the secret police provided shelter to the RAF terrorists in the GDR. They also led to the identification of several prominent Stasi informers. Other reconstructed findings include the plans of the MfS to establish isolation camps for political opponents of the SED regime, as well as documents on Nazi war crimes investigations.

About us



Former German president Joachim Gauck with the ambassador of Guatemala José Francisco Calí Tzay (left) and Federal Commissioner Roland Jahn in the archive, 13.01.2017, photo: BStU/Mulders

A Short History of the BStU

On 3 October 1990, the day of German reunification, the Rostock pastor Joachim Gauck was appointed “Special Commissioner of the Federal Government for the Personal Records of the Former State Security Service.”

The Stasi Records Act went into effect on 29 December 1991, two years after the first Stasi offices in the GDR were stormed. The “Special Commissioner” became the first “Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former GDR.” On 2 January 1992, the first GDR citizens viewed documents that the Stasi had compiled about them.

In October 2000, Joachim Gauck was succeeded by Marianne Birthler. In March 2011 she was followed by Roland Jahn as Federal Commissioner, who was confirmed for a second five-year term in June 2016. Each officeholder was elected in the German Bundestag by a broad majority.

Regional History of the Revolution

The archives in the regional offices of the BStU provide evidence of the Stasi’s widespread influence throughout the entire country and its disempowerment during the Peaceful Revolution. In 12 of the 14 former GDR district capitals (excluding Berlin), Stasi documents from the former Stasi district administrations are archived locally. These local archives are a visible legacy of the revolution in these regions and support concrete reappraisal efforts. The regional offices in Dresden, Erfurt, Frankfurt (Oder), and Halle also maintain information and documentation centres.

These regional offices provide documents for special events, exhibitions, and projects with schools. By informing the public about the methods of the Stasi, they contribute to the historical reappraisal of the Stasi in their region. They also make educational materials and travelling exhibitions available to schools, memorial sites and public institutions at no charge.

The Stasi files document how the Stasi observed life in the GDR. Thus they contain important information about regional history on topics such as environmental policy and youth culture.



Contact

Berlin Central Office

Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 31/33 | 10178 Berlin
Postal address: 10106 Berlin
Tel.: 030 2324-50 | E-Mail: post@bstu.bund.de

Citizens Advisory Office

Personal advice is available at the following times:
Mon–Thurs 8am–12pm and 1pm–5pm, Fri 8am–2pm
Telephone information and appointments: 030 2324-7000

Requests from researchers and media representatives

AU 5 | AU 6
Tel.: 030 2324-9051 / -9061 | Fax: 030 2324-9059 / -9069
E-Mail: GZ.AU5@bstu.bund.de | GZ.AU6@bstu.bund.de

Stasi Records Archive in Berlin

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Tel.: 030 2324-6699 | Fax: 030 2324-6619

Education and Research Department

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Fax: 030 2324-8809
E-Mail: GZ.BF@bstu.bund.de

Specialised Library

Hours:
Mon, Tues, Thurs 9am–4pm
Wed 9am–6pm
Fri 9am–2:30pm

Tel.: 030 2324-8862
Fax: 030 2324-8819
E-Mail: bibliothek@bstu.bund.de

Historical and Political Education and Exhibitions

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File cards in the Stasi Records Archive in Leipzig, photo: BStU

Regional Office Chemnitz

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Stasi file cabinets and offices sealed with signets, photo: BStU/michael uhlmann ... photographie

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Back cover: File cabinet with signets in the exhibition "Access to Secrecy,"
photo: BStU/Mulders

