

IT'S A MARATHON - NOT A SPRINT REMEMBRANCE AS DUTY

In 1998, just nine years after the fall of the Wall, the German Bundestag established the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany. Two topics dominated public discussion at the time. At first, the secret police "Stasi" and its hundreds of thousands of informers became the focus of public interest. For the first time in Germany, people could take a look at the previously top-secret files of the dreaded secret police. Hundreds of thousands now wanted to know: How did the Stasi destroy my life? Who worked for the Stasi and who betrayed whom? Soon after the German reunification, in both East and West, disillusionment set in.

In the East German states, a nostalgic review of the ostensible security under socialism seemed to override the memory of repression and a lack of freedom. And the West, after a brief euphoria over unity, lost interest in the "new ones". At the time, a saying circulated putting the already palpable alienation in a nutshell. An East German says to a West German: "We have always looked to the West". The West German replies: "So have we".

In this situation, our Federal Foundation was to contribute to a comprehensive confrontation with communist rule, the division of Germany and its consequences. Thus we had to clarify that the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was not a "Stasi dictatorship", but that the communist state party determined life. Furthermore, we were supposed to strengthen the anti-totalitarian consensus in society and contribute to German unity.

The term "transitional justice" has become established internationally for all these processes. This includes both the legal handling of dictatorships, tyranny or wars as well as the comprehensive and long-lasting transformation processes in politics, economy and society. These still have an impact on the lives of every single individual today.

What kind of projects promote an all-German awareness, public debates and a critical examination of communist rule in the eastern part of Germany? Every year we finance about 150 projects of other institutions such as associations, victims' organisations, museums and memorials, but also academic establishments and institutions of political education. These include exhibitions, films, panel discussions but also support for the victims of the dictatorship. In addition, we conduct our own studies, exhibitions and organise public discussions that deal with the repressions and constraints in the GDR just as controversially as with current questions and debates on freedom of opinion or plurality.

In this way, we build a bridge from the past to the present and draw attention to the central differences between dictatorship and democracy.

Over and over again we hear: What is it to me? That was ages ago... Meanwhile, several generations have not had to experience the communist dictatorship in Germany. Nevertheless, there are also those who have come to Germany in recent years and were confronted with a lack of freedom, with war or violence. With our educational programmes and web offerings, we take these different horizons of experience and knowledge into consideration.

Reputable influencers convey this content in the new media to an audience that is as broad as it is young. Our successful poster exhibitions also contribute to this. In several thousand copies and many languages, they travel to almost all continents. They take up historical issues as well as current affairs. The most recent exhibition deals with people's experiences after the German reunification.

For many, the changes caused traumas as well as hope and euphoria. People were not prepared for the upheavals and the associated changes. Many lost their jobs and thus the possibility to safeguard their existence. Some of this still has an effect today and shapes attitudes. However, similar experiences can also be observed in numerous other countries, which can be used as a basis for joint international projects. With our international exchange programme "Memory Work" we promote international networking, organise study trips and conferences.



Deutsches Generalkonsulat Chengdu Huang Shuaishuai



To this end, we exchange ideas with colleagues worldwide and discuss models for coming to terms with the effects of dictatorship and tyranny. This is the only way enabling an open and critical "view beyond one's own nose". Reappraisal thrives on diversity, decentralisation and a wide range of experiences. This makes it easier to understand why some people became victims while others were able to lead relatively quiet lives.

We dispense impulses, stimulate discussions, regard ourselves as service providers and contribute our international expertise in coming to terms with the impact of dictatorship (transitional justice). Time and time again we emphasize that even though the last dictatorship in Germany ceased to exist 30 years ago, we are still struggling with the consequences today. Coming to terms with the past requires stamina: it is a marathon, not a sprint.

You can find more information about our activities on our homepage (www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de) and our social media channels Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

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Photos: Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany



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