Coming to Terms with Totalitarian Dictatorships

NEWSLETTER ON MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS

This newsletter is published by the department of memorial sites and museums at the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the East German Communist Dictatorship. It is intended to facilitate communication across national borders to exchange knowledge and appreciation of different national memory cultures mainly in Eastern, central, and Western European countries. To achieve such a more transparent communication, this newsletter will be published both in English and German three to four times a year.

This newsletter focuses above all on communist dictatorships and their legacies particularly as regards the Cold War period, though it is understood that especially for Eastern European countries, communist repression cannot be separated from Nazi occupation and crimes inflicted by Nazi Germany. Likewise, it is understood that communist dictatorships only indirectly influenced life in Western European countries. We therefor thought it best to provide a venue to introduce and discuss different historical narratives in various countries from the perspectives of their relevant memorial sites and historical museums.

Each issue will have a special theme besides bringing together information on current and past events as well as new exhibits and publications. The first issue is devoted to memory culture in Germany. It contains a general article on memory culture in Germany with a focus on the period of the divided Germany after World War II. We also include a presentation of one exemplary place of remembrance, the Bautzen Memorial near Dresden (see photo). Moreover, we present a few examples of activities in Germany, such as conferences of for example memorial sites and museums in former prisons of the East German secret police “Stasi” and also other prisons in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) where political prisoners were kept under inhumane conditions. Finally, we also present examples of international collaborations, such as our memory culture study tour abroad and our International Memorial Sites Conference in Poland.

You are cordially invited to send us your proposals for further newsletters. We look forward to your feedback and future contributions.
In the course of the 20th century Germany experienced two different dictatorships—the twelve years of Nazi Germany’s “Third Reich” between 1933 and 1945 and the 40 years of communist rule in East Germany between 1949 and 1989 (the latter preceded by Soviet military occupation of Eastern Germany and East Berlin since 1945 when German communists were guided in building up dictatorial structures).

Both periods of dictatorships had some structural elements in common while they also differed considerably. Both dictatorships started and ended differently, with Nazi Germany resorting to a global war of aggression resulting in millions of war dead and the genocide of European Jewry. Respective crimes committed by the two German dictatorships differed vastly in scope and geographical range. After the demise of Nazi Germany and the end of Second World War in Europe, Soviet military authorities used some former Nazi concentration camps in Eastern Germany between 1945 and 1950 for their ten “special internment camps” to detain real and many alleged national-socialists. About 43,000 of them, i.e. 35 percent of the interned individuals, perished.

Germans have come to terms with those two dictatorships in a number of significantly different ways during and since the end of the Cold War. The German population in what became the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) experienced two succeeding dictatorships from 1933 to 1945 and 1945 to 1989. The GDR was founded on 7 October 1949. It was ruled by the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) with vital assistance of the Soviet Union but without popular legitimization. A façade of “democratic” institutions was set up with the SED actually pulling all the strings. People in this socialist state experienced varied forms of repression. Opponents of the regime, or, in the early postwar years, members of rival political parties were at any time subject to administrative repression or arbitrary arrests. The judicial system was entirely at the service of the SED’s political interests. All in all, about 250,000 people were arrested between 1949 and 1989 for political reasons (between 1961 and 1989 about 30,000 of them were released to the West after the West German government had paid a ransom to GDR authorities).

“Following the East Germans’ self-liberation, a process of self-democratization began.”
Free elections on 18 March 1990 resulted in an overwhelming majority for East German political parties advocating rapid reunification with the Western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). By then the slogan from the beginning of the revolution had changed to “We are one people.” Ensuing negotiations between government representatives from both German states then culminated in a currency, economic, and social union on 1 July 1990 and in a comprehensive Unification Treaty signed on 31 August 1990. After extensive multilateral and bilateral deliberations, on 12 September 1990 the four victorious allied powers of World War II (USSR, USA, Great Britain, France) ratified in Moscow with both German states the so-called “2+4 Treaty,” paving the way for German reunification and the reunified Germany’s membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance. Soviet armed forces in the GDR, which that at height of the Cold War in Europe had amounted to 400,000 men, were to leave the Eastern part of united Germany by 1994.

Hardly any other democracy during the course of the 20th century took more initiatives and steps, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to come to terms with the lasting legacy of injustice from a past dictatorship than united Germany did since 1990 in the case of communist East Germany.

Researchers working at Universities and elsewhere discovered a variety of new topics and published new knowledge which enlightened the past reality of the East German Dictatorship. More than 2,000 research projects were accomplished since 1990. Especially the field of opposition and resistance against the regime as well as repression and political persecution came into the centre of historical interest.
**Bautzen Memorial**

Sven Riesel

**Bautzen prison**

The two prison buildings were erected at roughly the same time - the "Bautzen State Penitentiary" in 1904 and the Bautzen II District Court Prison two years later. In less than two decades, innocent and unjustly convicted individuals were being incarcerated in the Bautzen prisons. Between 1933 and 1945, numerous people were detained there under the National Socialist regime on racist or political grounds.

The smaller Bautzen II prison was used to house prisoners held in judicial and protective custody. Interrogated by the SA for days on end and often mistreated, many of the detainees were then transported to concentration camps. From 1940 onwards, Bautzen II served more as a transit station for Czech resistance fighters such as Julius Fučík, who was sentenced to death by the Volksgerichtshof (People's Court) in Berlin in 1943.

During that period, Bautzen I had space for more than 1,500 prisoners, thereby making it the fifth largest penal institution in the Third Reich. In addition to being a penal facility for adults, Bautzen I also served as a juvenile detention centre. Under the radicalised juvenile penal law interpreted according to ethnic criteria, any youths considered to be “deviant” were detained in Bautzen. Numerous people, victims of the racist and ethnic legislation, were locked up here on the grounds of their “alien race”, political leanings or for being “antisocial”. In particular, this included Sinti and Roma, Jews, Poles, social democrats and communists, and homosexuals. One of the most prominent detainees of the National Socialist regime, leader of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) Ernst Thälmann, was detained in Bautzen I until 1944 when he was deported to and murdered in the Buchenwald concentration camp.

**Soviet Special Internment Camp Bautzen**

After the war, the Soviet occupying forces continued to use the prison as a special internment camp, a so-called “Speziallager”. Originally used for the internment of National Socialist functionaries and war criminals, the purpose of the special internment camp changed soon. From 1946 onwards, thousands of people who had been condemned by the Soviet Military Tribunals (SMT) entered the camp. Whoever resisted the increasing Stalinization of post-war eastern Germany or stood up for democratic structures was arrested by the Soviet secret service, the NKVD. Interrogations were carried out in its remand centres such as Bautzen II. Beatings, sleep deprivation and miserable hygienic conditions were the order of the day. Following their conviction in swift processes, the prisoners were detained in special internment camps.

The conditions in the “Yellow Misery” were catastrophic. More than 6,000 prisoners were kept isolated from the outside world in cramped conditions. By 1956, more than 3,000 prisoners had died as a result of the extreme overcrowding, hunger, cold and disease. They were hastily buried in an undignified manner in mass graves next to the camp’s premises. The camp was dissolved in 1950 and continued as a penal institution of the Volkspolizei, the GDR people’s police. The detainees hoped in vain for a quick release, or at least an improvement in the prison conditions. In desperation, the prisoners staged an uprising but this was brutally put down by the people’s police. Only in 1956, three years after Stalin’s death, were the majority of those sentenced by the SMT released.
Isolation in Bautzen

In 1977, Rudolf Bahro published an extract of his critical book “The Alternative” in the Federal Republic of Germany. He was arrested shortly afterwards and in 1978 he was sentenced to eight years in prison for “transmitting messages for a foreign power and disclosure of state secrets”. Bahro’s arrival in Bautzen II was met with dramatic international protests. A heavily partitioned corridor was set up in the west wing as an isolation wing for the prominent prisoner in addition to the existing isolation areas in the rest of the building.

This “forbidden zone” was occupied by those people who were considered a particular security risk. In Bautzen II, which was itself located on the south eastern periphery of the GDR prison state, the isolation wing was like a prison within a prison. Despite its central position within the town, the detention building was cut off from the outside. Structurally contained in a “complex in which the public prosecutors, county court, state security and district police were also housed”, Erich Loest described the place in his prison memoirs as an isolated “justice collective”.

Contrary to the penal law of the GDR, numerous Bautzen II prisoners were strictly segregated from the others for the entire duration of their detention: during meal times, during their exercise in the yard, during their work. Very few people actually saw these prisoners.

The isolation wing, called “Kleines Kommando” (cramped commando) by the guards, could only be accessed by certain prison staff. Various isolation zones could be created within Bautzen II as required. For example, in the main building, some of the cells around an occupied cell were left empty in order to prevent illegal communication. The Iranian spy Hossein Yazdi was kept in such isolated imprisonment, at first with his brother, but then completely alone for more than fifteen years. In the 1960s and 1970s, the top floor of the building was used to incarcerate an entire submarine fighter command of the Volksmarine (the People’s Navy) without the other prisoners being aware of their presence.

The partitioning within the prison was perfect. Individual prisoners were completely separated from the others; those prisoners working in gangs saw only the same cell mates year after year. This isolation from one another among the prison society in the microcosm of Bautzen II calmed the fears of the staff of open and unsupervised discussions and actions.

Bautzen Memorial

In 1989, the societal and political upheaval in the GDR was so dramatic that it even penetrated the prison walls of Bautzen II. One of the first demands made by the prisoners was for the dissolution of the isolation wing. By Christmas 1989, all of the political prisoners had been released. Three years later, and the prison was closed completely.

Today, Bautzen I is still a modern penal institution. Since 1993, the Bautzen Memorial located in the former Bautzen II prison has been documenting the history of both detention centres during National Socialism, the Soviet occupation and the GDR dictatorship. It also remembers the victims of political violence and persecution who were incarcerated or perished in the town’s two prisons during the dictatorships of the 20th century.

The work of remembrance has taken on many forms: permanent exhibitions document the history of the two prisons during the three periods of persecution; talks by contemporary witnesses, guided tours and school projects are offered on an almost daily basis. The historical collection, the library and the contemporary witness archive may be used by anyone with an interest in the subject. With evening events such as dance and theatre shows, concerts, readings, panel discussions, summer cinema and memorial events, to name just a few, the memorial uses an extensive range of media to fulfill its duty as a location for the Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten (Saxony Memorials Foundation) for the remembrance of the victims of political tyranny. More than 100,000 visitors make use of the comprehensive information and events provided by the Bautzen Memorial every year.
Every year, representatives of memorials and museums meet at the invitation of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the East German Communist Dictatorship, the Kreisau/Krzyzowa Foundation, the European Network for Remembrance and Solidarity, the Evangelical Academy Berlin and the German Resistance Memorial Center to present their work and discuss concepts for the dealing with the legacies of the two totalitarian systems. The tenth East-West European Memorial Sites Conference will take place 21st - 24th March 2012. The main theme of all previous meetings has been the issue of the multiple experiences of dictatorships and injustice in Europe and their consequences. Discussions include various topics and examples from different countries.

The upcoming small anniversary of the East-West European Memorial Sites Conference intends to discuss the prevailing narrative on European history and one’s own country within Europe. It will enquire about the perspectives which lie behind the methods used by the individual countries for coming to terms with the past. One occasion which gave rise to focusing on these perspectives was the “Nationale Geschichtsbilder” (National Views of History) call to action by Memorial Russia in 2009: “National remembrance processes the common experience in its own way, gives it its own meaning. Every nation has its own 20th century.”

The East-West European Memorial Conference is aimed at memorial or museum staff, people who deal with school projects about the history of National Socialism, Jewish genocide, Stalinism and the communist dictatorship and other forms of totalitarian tyranny and resistance movements. The conference is a forum for a pan-European exchange of practical experiences from representatives who actively participate in historical and political educational work, and academics.

Information on the next Memorial Sites Conference can be found in the events information.
Event retrospect
Study Tour 2011 to Yekaterinburg and Perm, Russia, 24-31 July 2011

Anja Werner

In the last week of July 2011, twenty-four directors of memorial sites, museums, archives, and initiatives dealing with the East German past as well as journalists, politicians, former East German civil rights activists, and Ph.D. students followed the invitation of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of Communist Dictatorships and joined our annual study tour to Yekaterinburg and Perm in Russia. The delegation was led by the chairman of the board of the Federal Foundation Rainer Eppelmann and the Foundation’s Executive Director, Dr. Anna Kaminsky.

The Federal Foundation organizes one such study tour per year to visit an Eastern European country and to get in touch with Representatives of the memory culture there in order to learn more about the specific situation in different countries and to find starting points for possible future collaborations. Previous study tours led to Albania, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Moscow (Russia).

During this year’s study tour, we visited Yekaterinburg and Perm. In Yekaterinburg, Anna Pastuchova, the director of Memorial Yekaterinburg, welcomed us and, together with local activists, accompanied us, among other things, to the memorial “12 kilometers” just outside the city, which commemorates the ca. 90,000 persons who were killed and buried there under Stalin. The activist and artist Yurij Kalmykov introduced us to two of his historical exhibitions that address aspects of Russia’s communist past, such as his Shuravi exhibit on the Afghan War of the 1980s. Shuravi draws attention to faces on both the Soviet and the Afghani side and brings to life individual stories of soldiers and also the soldiers’ families and friends, who typically were not allowed to know that their loved ones had been sent to Afghanistan. A separate room in the exhibition was designated a quiet space to remember the dead.

A very different kind of memory culture may also be traced in Yekaterinburg, for it was here that in the summer of 1918 the Bolsheviks had the last Russian Tsar, his family, and a few members of their entourage murdered. At the site of the crime in recent years an orthodox church was erected to commemorate the victims of this crime. The remains of the Tsar and his family were at the Ganina Yama, an old mine shaft, near Yekaterinburg, where in recent years a monastery was built.

The second part of our study tour led us to Perm, where we also visited a former KGB prison. While the main building is nowadays a puppet theater, the area in the back is being turned into a memorial site—an initiative of Memorial Perm and particularly its youth section. We also got a sense of German-life in the Urals, as we visited the German reading room in the local public library. Moreover, we met with Zoya Lukyanova, General Director of the Autonomous Nonprofit Organization „Civic Engagement Institute,“ and Svetlana Kolchurina, President of the Perm Regional Public Organization “Roza Vetrov” (Wind Rose), with whom we engaged in a discussion on the topic “Minority. Identification. Globalization.”

A visit to a former church that during Soviet times had been turned into a gallery introduced us to an impressive collection of icons and wood sculptures that allow visitors to obtain a fascinating glimpse of both church traditions in Russia and also the Soviets’ repression of the church. The discussion with the gallery’s director prompted debates on how the Russian Federation deals with this double-legacy today.

The study tour’s highlight was likely the visit to the Gulag museum Perm-36, the only former Gulag on the territory of the Russian Federation that was turned into a museum. We arrived during the annual festival “Pilorama,” which brings together former prisoners, activists, and artists from Russia and abroad. The fact that rain was pouring down added to the dreary atmosphere of the former camp, which is located some two and a half hours outside of Perm. Our host was the museum’s director, Tatiana Kursina.
**Conference: Heritage from the Cold War Period. Then, Now and in the Future, Riga, Latvia, 8-10 September 2011**

**Johannes Bach Rasmussen**

**Conference Information**
A conference about heritage from the Cold War period was held in Riga, Latvia, September 9 and 10, 2011. The title was: *Heritage from the Cold War period. Then, now and in the future.* The conference also commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Riga Barricades and the freedom struggles. The 55 participants from relevant museums, institutions and NGO organizations represented all the countries bordering the Baltic Sea as well as Norway and Iceland. The conference was initiated by The Archipelago Museum, Denmark, and The Baltic Initiative and Network.

In 5 sessions, the conference treated the following topics:
- The historical sites: Registering, protecting and informing;
- New museums and exhibitions: Concepts and exhibition ideas;
- Main principles and success factors for major gift fundraising;
- 20th anniversary of the Riga Barricades and the freedom struggles.

The participants visited the former KGB headquarter in Riga (together with contemporary witnesses) and a secret nuclear bunker for the Soviet nomenclature in Ligatne near Riga.

**Conference Goal**
The primary aim of the conference was to strengthen mutual understanding between the countries bordering the Baltic Sea—including Western European countries as well as former Soviet states and former satellite countries of the USSR—through an exchange of information on their recent history. The underlying idea is that history can effectively be told from historically valuable and authentic sites at which historical events actually took place: *It happened here.* A key focus is therefore to motivate the inhabitants of the Baltic Sea countries to visit their neighbours and find out more about recent history by getting to know historical sites and museums in the different Baltic Sea countries.

The conference was also intended to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the *Riga Barricades* and the freedom struggles. The participants visited some of the key sites of these important events as well as the central KGB prison in Riga and the Nuclear Bunker for the Soviet Nomenclature in Ligatne.

The conference focused especially on some of the necessary preconditions for mutual information activities, namely *the registering and protecting of the historical sites* as well as some *new exhibition ideas.* Hence the title of the conference: *Heritage from the Cold War period: Then, now and in the future.* It is the intention of the conference to encourage more countries bordering the Baltic Sea to strengthen their efforts to protect recent historical sites and also to strengthen their information activities directed both at their own inhabitants and foreign visitors.

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**FOLLOW-UP**
The conference papers will be published on the website coldwarsites.net.

For more information, please contact the Conference Manager, Mr. Johannes Bach Rasmussen, Secretary of The Baltic Initiative and Network, at jbr@johannesbach.dk.
"Detention Under the Stasi Regime", a workshop held at the Moritzplatz Memorial in Magdeburg,

The two-day workshop focused upon the primary sources of Stasi-effected (remand) detention and discussed new research findings. A concluding panel discussion focused exclusively upon the issue of "Conservation | Restoration | Modernisation? Memorials Sited at Erstwhile Detention Facilities Caught Between the Imperative of Re-development and the Need to Retain Authenticity".

The workshop aimed to provide an integrative network for personnel employed by and within memorial trusts, initiatives, archives and other establishments concerned with Stasi-effected (remand) detention. Additionally, opportunities for synergistic collaboration were to be determined in all operational areas, and inter-disciplinary research and documentation fields that were to be configured as collaborative research and documentation projects were to be identified, made operational and implemented.

This was the second such workshop, the first having been held in Potsdam in the autumn of 2010. Owing to the level of interest evinced, it was concluded that such a workshop should take place on a recurring basis – once a year – thus permitting the establishment of a permanent forum that would focus upon concrete issues pertaining to memorial work undertaken at erstwhile detention facilities established under a communist dictatorship.

Such a forum provides an opportunity not only to work collaboratively to address substantive issues, but also to develop presentation methods, such as the use of multimedia modules alongside traditional and photographic formats. Furthermore, a forum of this sort is equipped to address specific challenges posed by work undertaken at the historical site, such as the structural design that is to be deployed for purposes of exposition, duly congruent with fire safety regulations and incorporating disabled access imperatives. Both present a specific challenge – especially given the constraints inherent in the configuration of a former detention facility – since such facilities are not designed to provide readily accessible means of escape.

The workshop was facilitated by the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the East German Communist Dictatorship.
Oral History Conference, Bad Arolsen, Germany, 17th-18th November 2011

Markus Leithold

Collaboration with witnesses of times past is becoming increasingly significant in a number of fields specific to memorial work, political education activities and also research. But what does being a witness of times past really mean and which are the various facets highlighted by such work? This question was at the heart of discussions held during this conference, which was organised by the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the East German Communist Dictatorship, specifically represented by its Executive Director, Dr. Anna Kaminsky, in conjunction with the Verein Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e.V. (Against Oblivion – For Democracy Regd. Society), headed by Dr. Michael Parak. Further conference topics spanned experiences gleaned in the course of collaborative activities at sites of politico-historical remembrance and education – and future development needs.

The event was preceded by a visit to the offices of the International Tracing Service (ITS) at Bad Arolsen. Founded as a British military tracing service, this organisation tabulates, archives and provides individuals or bodies that commission its services access to missing or deceased civil Jewish and foreign detainees and forced labourers in attendance under the “Third Reich”. During the review of the archives, Sebastian Schönemann (Scientific Associate with the ITS) pointed out that the ITS did indeed persist in its humanitarian mission, asserted upon its launch, but that the organisation’s remit had been redefined in the 1970s and thereafter. This also resulted in making the archives accessible to scientific bodies, research institutions and memorial trusts in November 2007.

There then followed an introductory session presented by Dr. Susanne Urban, Head of the Department of Research within ITS. Her presentation assessed altered external profiling specific to documentation and educational opportunities, considering this to be a worthwhile activity, enabling the public to participate directly in the workings of the ITS. She emphasised that the ITS library, being primarily concerned with making group-specific research literature available, did not in the least consider itself to be a competitor of “traditional” memorial libraries. In conclusion, Ms. Urban dealt with the difficulties encountered while applying pedagogical approaches to research material, the latter subsisting solely from the perspective of the perpetrators and allied groups.

The evening session, presented by Prof. Alexander von Plato, Historian at the University of Hagen, incorporated an interview-based project which was conducted in conjunction with contemporary witnesses and which chronicled the bombing of Dresden. Prof. von Plato highlighted a core problem that emerged repeatedly in a number of portrayals and reports of the events that unfolded in February 1945 – that of numbers of actual fatalities. In the process, he picked up on the assumption frequently made in the annals of historical research, namely that witnesses of times past are prone to subjective exaggeration when addressing this issue. As was established by von Plato, however, this cannot be empirically proven on the basis of the interviews held. The majority of the contemporary witnesses questioned by him expressed themselves with reticence in this regard or proffered information that was consistent with the definitive findings of historical research.

Gundula Klein, museum educator at the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum (Historical Forum) Leipzig and the Tränenpalast (“Palace of Tears”), Berlin, held a lecture on the relationship that exists between the Historical Forum exhibition and its patrons. She commenced the session by broadening the definition of the term “contemporary witness”, limiting it to people expressing shared parameters of subjectivity and remembrance. The argument put forth was that museum patrons are not to be considered on par with contemporary witnesses, although significant areas of overlap exist between the two groups. She went on to expound upon the need for an intensified biographical experience and for the establishment of a dialogue by and with such patrons and visitors, many of whom might well have first-hand experience of the time preceding German unification.

In a further session that dealt with their project, “Working With Witnesses to the Trajectory of the GDR”, Dr. Heidi Behrens (Bildungswerk der Humanistischen Union, North Rhine Westfalia) and Christian Klein (Managing Director, Zeitpfeil Regd.) examined the influence of witnesses of times past on political education opportunities. They emphasised the danger of over-simplifying complex issues and facts, since biographies of contemporary witnesses are frequently considered to impart historical truths. In reality, however, such narratives would exert little influence on the world view of people with a rounded historical perspective. The subsequent discussion once again threw into relief the complexity of the time witness concept, which – while by no means a neologism in its characteristics and function – is certainly to be considered as such in terms of its etymology.
Within the parameters of their project, “Walls 2.0”, Jana König, Inga Turczyn and Elisabeth Steffen, students at the Humboldt University of Berlin, showed how the concepts “migrant” and “raceism” evolved in the course of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The students based their propositions on the 1990 film “Duvarlar-Mauern-Walls”. Those interviewed regarding their attitudinal patterns vis-à-vis migrants and their perceptions of xenophobia in the reunified Federal Republic of Germany encompassed protagonists of the film as well as numerous public figures. During the course of the discussion, it became apparent that the representational collusion of experts and witnesses of times past would also result in conceptual diffusion and, further, that this could provide no information with respect to historical authenticity, irrespective of the normative allusions of its associative nuances.

According to Ernst Klein, Dr. Anna Kaminsky and Dr. Michael Parak, Bad Arolsen constituted a fitting conference venue, as the work of the ITS also assists in definitively placing the biographical evidence and experiences of witnesses of times past at the forefront of perceptions of history.

NEWS

New Memorial Guide „Places of remembrance“
The documentary project „Places of remembrance“ realised by Federal Foundation for the reappraisal of communist dictatorships contains more than 6,000 monuments, memorial places and museums. Over 600 of these places are situated in Germany. Here you may find a selection of the most important places of remembrance in Germany. For more information, see: http://www.stiftung-aufarbeitung.de/places-of-remembrance

The Baltic Initiative and Network
The Baltic Initiative and Network has got a new organizational structure. 20 new historical sites/museums and several videos with eye witnesses are added to the website in the last month. For more information, see: www.coldwarsites.net

Tenth International Memorial Summit, Kreisau, 21st - 24th March 2012
The Memorial Summit in Kreisau is to be centred upon diverse perceptions and interpretations of a past that played itself out in the erstwhile communist states of Europe – seen from a pan-European perspective. This year’s convention examines “A Narrative on European History in the 20th Century”. For more information, see: http://www.stiftung-aufarbeitung.de/veranstaltungen-2012-3367.html

International Museum Fellowship
“The Federal Cultural Foundation’s International Museum Fellowship programme offers museums and public collections in Germany the opportunity to hire young, top-level foreign researchers and curators to work at their organizations. The goal of the fellowship programme is to encourage German museums to internationalize their topics, working methods and areas of emphasis and support them in applying new approaches to their established organizational structures. The programme also aims to improve intercultural competence within the museums themselves, as well as strengthen international networks between scientists, curators and museologists.

“The [German] Federal Cultural Foundation invites museums to apply for an 18-month, project-based work and research fellowship to finance the visit of a young researcher or curator from abroad. The Foundation will award a total of 20 fellowships, for which publicly accessible, state and / or municipally funded museums, collections and exhibition venues of all kinds may apply. In the case of private-law entities, applicants are eligible if they also receive public funding from a municipal, state or federal agency.”

The application deadline is 30 April 2012.

For more information, see: http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/cms/en/programme/fellowship_internationales_museum/ (English) or http://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/cms/de/programme/fellowship_internationales_museum/ (German).
East European Memory Studies Newsletter

Published in English by Memory at War, East European Memory Studies focuses on cultural dynamics in Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine.

The November 2011 edition includes an examination by Meike Wulf of the University of Maastricht on “Changing Memory Regimes in a New Europe,” focusing on the post-1989 clash of Eastern European double-dictatorship legacies with commonly held Western interpretations.

A diary of forthcoming events through June 2012 is followed by reviews of recent events discussing the Bergen web wars conference that took place late last summer as well as the Memory, Religion and Revolution Workshop at Cambridge in October 2011.

The December edition features Aleida Assmann, expert on memory culture at the University of Konstanz in Germany on “Ghosts of the Past.” Find out more at: http://www.memoryatwar.org/ (English).

Palace of Tears in Berlin Opens Permanent Exhibit

In September 2011 the “Palace of Tears” opened its new permanent exhibit. Located centrally in Berlin right next to the metro station Friedrichstrasse, the “Palace of Tears” was the gateway for visitors from West-Berlin to Eastern Germany. It received its nickname due to the fact that often close relatives parted here after a visit not knowing when they would see each other again. The exhibit concentrates on the East German border regime with a special focus on border crossings. Numerous contemporary witnesses present their stories in multi-media installations. They also donated personal objects to the museum that give inside into the questions of how escape attempts were organized and carried out as well as how the refugees, once they had reached the West, attempted to keep their personal memories of the East alive. The “Palace of Tears” is a part of the House of History in Bonn and the Forum of Contemporary History in Leipzig. In contrast to the other two, the “Palace of Tears” is housed in an actual historic site. See http://www.hdg.de/berlin/traenenpalast-am-bahnhof-friedrichstr/ (German).

Former Stasi detention facility at Andreasstraße in Erfurt

The Thuringia state government has unified the regional foundations engaged in the reappraisal of the East German communist dictatorship. Thus, the “Gedenken, Erinnern, Lernen” (Commemoration, Remembrance, Learning) Foundation and the Ettersberg Foundation have been merged to form the “Stiftung Ettersberg. Europäische Diktaturforschung - Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur - Gedenkstätte Andreasstraße” (Ettersberg Foundation for the Examination of European Dictatorship and the Reappraisal of the East German Communist Dictatorship – Andreasstraße Memorial). The memorial housed within the former remand prison established by the Ministry for State Security at Andreasstraße in Erfurt is, therefore, to come under the auspices of the Ettersberg Foundation.

New Memorial Sites Developing at former East German Prisons

In May 2011, former political prisoners bought the building of their old prison in Cottbus. Dating back to the mid-19th century, the prison building was heavily destroyed in World War II and reconstructed in 1945 to hold 1,400 prisoners. In 1951, it was placed under the jurisdiction of the East German Ministry of the Interior and run by the East German police. The prison is known for the fact that between 1963 and 1989 prisoners were sold to the West from there, but that holds true also for other East German prison facilities. From 1990 until it was closed down in 2002, the building functioned as a jail of the state of Brandenburg. A plate was placed in 1998 commemorating the innocent victims of political persecution between 1933 and 1945 as well as between 1945 and 1989.

Hohen Brandenburg was the infamous prison for women in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Located in Stollberg (today in the federal German state of Saxony), it served to imprison countless women who had been arrested for political reasons. Many of these women had shown their criticism of the GDR by attempting to escape but were caught. Others had found different means of creative protest against the East German dictatorship. At this point, an exhibit in Stollberg focuses on the history of women who during the late 1940s and in the 1950s had been arrested and sentenced by Soviet Military Tribunals. They were sent to Hohen Brandenburg after Soviet special internment camps in Eastern Germany had been closed. A new permanent exhibit on location will tell the changing history of the prison.

The Stasi-prison in Neustrelitz stood empty and unused until a few years back students from a local high school began researching its history. Earlier this year (in March 2011), an association was formed to keep the memory alive and to create a memorial site and place of learning. The site is particularly interesting as the Stasi abandoned the prison already in 1988 (moving to another location instead), that is, one year before during the peaceful revolution the East German people brought down the communist dictatorship in Eastern Germany. As the building was not used afterwards, the situation from the late 1980s has been preserved.
Tenth International Memorial Summit, Kreisau, 21st -24th March 2012

The Memorial Summit in Kreisau is to be centred upon diverse perceptions and interpretations of a past that played itself out in the erstwhile communist states of Europe – seen from a pan-European perspective. What is the trajectory of politico-historical disputes in individual countries and in the context of specific institutions? What is the “external” perception and interpretation of such phenomena? Institutions based in various countries are to present their strategies for facilitating the expression of views of history and responses thereto. This year’s convention examines “A Narrative on European History in the 20th Century”. The application form and event programme will be accessible from the end of January 2012 onwards at www.krzystowa.pl. The venue is to be the International Youth Centre, Kreisau, Krzyzowa 7, PL 58 112, Grodziszcze, Poland. The official convention languages are Polish, Russian and German: simultaneous interpretation facilities are available.
Between 1992 and 1998, the German Parliament Deutscher Bundestag had two committees of inquiry research the history of the East German communist dictatorship and its consequences for German unity. The result was a 1998 law creating the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the East German Communist Dictatorship (Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur). Located centrally in Berlin, the Foundation started operating in the fall of 1998. It is not to be confused with the Federal Commissioner of the Files of the Former East German Secret Service (Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, BSTU), whose main task is to preserve and make available the archives of the so-called Stasi, the East German secret police.

“Working in cooperation with other institutions,” so our mission statement reads, “the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED (Socialist Union Party) Dictatorship has the statutory mission to promote a comprehensive reappraisal of the origins, history, and consequences of the Soviet occupation zone in Germany and in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The foundation promotes remembrance of the regime’s injustices and the fate of its victims. It fosters the anti-totalitarian consensus in our society, our democracy, and the inner unity of Germany, as well as strengthens international cooperation as regards the critical reappraisal of dictatorships, especially in European frameworks” (Tätigkeitsbericht 2008, p. 9).

The German parliament created our Foundation in order to keep the memory of communist crimes alive and to give its victims a voice. Our main goal is to reach a broader public and to stir public debates concerning a critical reappraisal of the East German communist dictatorship. We do not do scholarly research ourselves, but we collect relevant materials to be used for example by scholars, with whom we also collaborate (besides collaborating with for example the media). We grant research fellowships. Above all, we fund exhibits, book publications, and documentary film projects. We also organize numerous public events such as film screenings and public debates with contemporary witnesses, scholars, and journalists. We offer extension studies workshops for teachers and for people who work with the victims of communist dictatorships as well as people who work for memorial sites and museums.

The Foundation owns an archive and a library with about 45,000 volumes.