Introduction

1   Approach of the investigation

From its founding years until now, the East German secret service, known as the Ministry for State Security, has fascinated people in different ways.[1] Even during the existence of the GDR, people both inside and outside the state showed enthusiasm for knowing more about this security organisation. Especially the people of today's eastern Germany simply see the need to uncover their past, whereas the *MfS*, having had the position it had, is considered the main key for what one might call a revelation. Over time, the interest only seems to have grown particularly since the German state authorities (after the unification in 1990) have given access to people to be able to look into the files once belonging to the *MfS*. Additionally, this is quite a unique experience opening many doors. This is the first archival material existing in the present context that once belonged to a Soviet Block state and security service, which is being allowed to be accessed by the public.

The growing interest also lies in the common, widespread thought of wanting to know more about what was hiding behind the hermetically locked borders of the GDR. Furthermore, since the GDR was geographically in the middle of Europe, this part of Europe also carries its special development and history, before, during and after the Second World War.[2] During the Cold War, it was well known that one of the most heavily guarded borders in the world was the East German border to the West, mainly because of sharing its borders with its often-claimed largest enemy, the FRG. The West Berliners experienced a unique position, since a part of the so-called 'free world' lied in the heart of the GDR, surrounded by

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[1] Officially, the Ministry's formal name was *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, MfS*. However, seen from the German point of view, both domestically as well as internationally it was better known as "*Stasi*" (a shortening for *Staatssicherheit*). Even though other names such as "the Firm" has been used to name the Ministry, the decision has fallen upon using the shortening initials "*MfS*". Besides, what was known as the republican state "East Germany" is synonymous with the shortening "GDR", "German Democratic Republic". The other German republican state (1949-1990), "West Germany", is known with the shortening "FRG", "Federal Republic of Germany".

[2] The term "Second World War" will from now on be shortened "WW II" (World War II).

heavily political and military forces like the superpower Soviet Union as well as the GDR. During the period when the Berlin Wall was being torn down, not only the German population showed interest towards wanting to know more about the whole structure of the GDR. Actually, the Berlin Wall being torn down also resulted in the Soviet power over the rest of Central and East Europe falling as well, opening even larger possibilities in many ways for the rest of the world.

Since the *MfS* before 1989 was known as perhaps the most feared security service in Europe, one of the points that among many people stood highest on the list to uncover was a closer look at the *MfS*. However, from those days, the 'new' Germany had a long way to go concerning several different matters.

Nevertheless, after nearly a year of a united Germany, the responsible authorities of the German state decided to put down a state authority that particularly was to force the East Germans into focusing past the fierce security service of the GDR.[3] 13 years after the unification of the two German states, many tasks remain uncompleted. Perhaps it holds more questions than answers. The state authority working with the files of the *MfS* is still active, mainly based on the aforementioned as well as the huge number of interested people turning up for different purposes. One of the focuses of this authority is to build up an overview of the work, structure and organisation of the *MfS*. Based on the work that has been done so far, many issues of the *MfS* are still uncovered before one may claim to have reached the set goals.

Even though this will be addressed further below in regards to the author's specific actions at the authority's offices, it would nevertheless be said a few words on this. Concerning the fields of interest for this thesis that is to be treated relating to the *MfS*, are the post and telephone control the security service

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[3] This state authority is perhaps commonly more known in German as the "*Gauck-Behörde*" (Gauck Authority), named after the first federal commissioner of the organisation (Joachim Gauck). Its formal name is *Die/Der Bundesbeauftragte(r) für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, BStU* (Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic). (Today's federal commissioner is Marianne Birthler).

accomplished.[4]   Although having been more or less treated through different contributions so far, the - files of the - *MfS* regarding these two control methods of the Ministry have nevertheless too often been given what one might call a 'surface focus'. Except from the already given reasoning, another explanation of such might lie in the fact that these control mechanisms often were pointed at the individual, which hence has been a typical focus both for those wanting to cover the work of the *MfS* as well as the "victims" having been exposed of such.[5]   Such topics, aims and focuses for the media could not be better, although not necessarily resulting in a satisfying outcome for everyone. We have often witnessed the contrary. What often has been prioritised for example within the media has been to get hold of the victims' personal stories, which the daily newspaper reader likely will enjoy reading at the breakfast table - perhaps without giving it a further thought. This is often the aim for such media, which thereby are to say the research automatically is of certain lower quality. However, it is nevertheless a well-known fact that different media work with a tabloid frame, amongst others, meaning working within a narrow period. Having such in mind, doing work in depth in the first place tends to be ignored. Secondly, the focus does not hold an overall view in terms of putting facts into a larger frame of understanding. Thirdly, the information given holds the impression of being too narrow and generally too selective in coherence with only focusing on reaching a commercial headline that sells the easiest and

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[4] Officially, the controlling of the post by the *MfS* was led by the *Abteilung M; Postkontrolle* (Department M; Post Control). Likewise, the telephone control was led by the *Abteilung 26; Telefonüberwachung* (Department 26; Telephone Surveillance). Even though having had quite clearly understandable names in terms of expected tasks, their tasks were although largely various meaning the names of the Departments do not capture all their areas of practical activity. However, general conceptions as those mentioned (in English) in terms of naming the Departments will be used. At the same time, with the interest of varying the use of the aforementioned definitions, other terminologies will be addressed these Departments. Nevertheless, they identically reflect the roles of the Departments. More specifically, this means that flexible and understandable terminologies such as for example "post control", "post surveillance", etc., reflects the complete understanding of the term "Department M", whereas "telephone control", "telephone surveillance", etc., addresses the same for the "Department 26". Being even more specific to the post control, when referring to this surveillance, the word "post" or "mail" will often be used, with the main interest of varying the use of words. As long as nothing else is being specified, for example explicitly mentioning "telegram", "package", "letter", etc., the understanding is however similar, due to the utilisation of capturing the overall frame of the conception of the control of the post traffic the Department M executed. Since the *MfS* in different ways used various names and characterisations towards the Departments M and 26 like those mentioned above, where relevant, yet closer focus will be given. This particularly involves Part C.

[5] Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall, one has often given labels on persons that were citizens of the GDR. In relation to the *MfS*, those persons somehow having been in the nest of control of the *MfS* are the so-called "victims", whereas those that somehow were connected to working for the *MfS* are the so-called "culprits". A discussion to such approaches will follow further in the thesis.

best.

With those latter words, the work intended to be undertaken here will aim to go thoroughly through the available material, treating both the general and specific information according to given methodological factors that are to be understood within a presented frame.[6] With such a starting point, it is possible to argue that one puts both the individuals' and system's experiences into a larger concept. The goal by doing so is having the possibility to achieve an understanding of the many roles of the GDR and *MfS*. Thus, a further result of this might also show that one is able to combine fascinating and sensitive details of people's experiences and destinies, having used the necessary tools for undertaking objective research.

The *MfS* came about as a Ministry 8 February 1950.[7] The reason was the people responsible for governing saw it as necessary to the existence of the GDR. Looking at it over its time of existence, some have claimed that the Ministry in certain ways grew to be a kind of superior state organ within the state. Especially, since as time went by, the GDR got a more or less independently operating security service.[8] It seemed as if this giant only was to grow and grow. However, as a paradox, when it had reached to be as large as never before, the *MfS* collapsed following the state apparatuses of the Soviet Union and GDR.

Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the unification of the GDR and FRG in 1990, the power and range of control the state security of the GDR in all its years had surprised a whole world. At the once Central (headquarters) of the *MfS* in Berlin (East), the biggest discovery of *MfS* archives and related material has been made. Even today, in different parts of eastern Germany, the work continues of opening archives and other material that once belonged to the fierce security organisation. Only in Berlin a content as large as somewhat close to 180 kilometres of files has been found, all of which contained sensitive and top secret information on several millions of GDR citizens.[9] As of today, it is unknown how many sacks of material are being opened and filed every day in Berlin. It is said to be very many. To put it in perspective, in one of the former *Bezirke-Bezirk* Rostock, where 'only' 3.4 kilometres of files have been found, 16 sacks are opened every day whereas ten pages on a daily basis are examined more

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[6] The steps and frame of the thesis will be given in the last point of the introduction.

[7] H. L. Lehmann, *Chronik der DDR. 1945/49 bis heute*. München 1987, p. 37.

[8] See e.g., C. Wilkening, *Staat im Staate. Auskünfte ehemaliger Stasi-Mitarbeiter*. 1. Auflage. Berlin und Weimar 1990, p. 5.

[9] BStU, *Fakten und Zahlen zum MfS*. Außenstelle Rostock 1999.

closely.[10]   Only in these sacks, which are part of the found aftermaths of the *MfS*, material exists that somehow has been heavily damaged by active forces of the *MfS* wanting to destroy them in 1989.

Mainly, the *MfS* led all the parts of the security work in the GDR. It means this organisation *per se* nearly had a monopoly in the GDR when it came to controlling and handling the security that took place both on and outside East German soil. The *MfS* was the GDR's security service that more or less from the beginning of its existence and to the end operated as a security organisation meant to secure the interests of *das Volk* (the People). In the newly established state GDR after WW II, the *MfS* functioned increasingly as a force against its own people and not for its people.

However, to try to tell the whole story of the *MfS* through one piece of work would be to grasp too many issues and areas concerning this theme. Before going on with the steps of the thesis, a few considerations of the methodological and source aspects should be given. It should be stressed that the focus of the thesis lays on the conditions, means and methods of the *MfS* by putting its weight through illustrations on its surveillance of the post and telephone traffic. In order to understand this focus there are certain fundamental steps of such an approach and understanding of the control that has to be taken, in order to be able to achieve insight into the types of mentioned surveillances being analysed. That is, especially if one considers that different states during the Cold War, and as of today, with different ways of governing practice some sort of intelligence, which most likely also includes the controlling of post and telephone. One important factor to answer is therefore what made it unique for the GDR to have its secret service. Another concern would be to understand how this service came about, and why it functioned. Furthermore, how it fulfilled its tasks. Such approaches and more will be addressed and are highly relevant to follow, in order to be able to understand the GDR and its secret service, including the post and telephone control.

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[10] The GDR had 15 *Bezirke*. A *Bezirk* was something close to what is known as a German *Bundesland* (Federal State), or in English as a district. While a *Bezirk* was the GDR's largest Administrative District (AD), a *Kreis* (also a district, however smaller) was a subdivision of a *Bezirk*. Differently from the federal Germany's inner states, the East German system did not have the same competence and influence on the central power. The central power in all matters was situated in the capital of the GDR, East Berlin. Apart from that, all the AD's were named after their capitals (Berlin having been somewhat special compared to the others). Therefore, the AD of Rostock had a town called Rostock, which was the political centre of the AD (as of today, this town is situated in the Federal State of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania). In the same way, the *MfS* was represented in every AD. However, the name of the Ministry's point of centre was the *Bezirksverwaltung*, *BV* (Administrative District Management, ADM). Concerning the political subdivisions of the AD's, the *MfS* was also present in those. In these smaller districts, the *MfS* called its places *Kreisdienststellen* (District Service Places, DSP's). Further analysis to the aforementioned will follow in the thesis.

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Besides these points, it is also relevant to draw a picture of how the East German population was repressed, especially in order to make it understandable for an outside audience that during the Cold War never experienced these weapons of repressive control. A further reason of both importance and interest to why this work should be looked upon with general value is the importance of giving such incidents a name and face. A name and face, as these issues involved many people that unfortunately, dominated by the lack of commercial beneficial interests, until now not have received the attention they deserve. Furthermore, we simply have to focus on political-historical, decisive periods such as this, which both should not and cannot be forgotten. We often hear in media about spectacular cases where the *MfS* was involved, although many of the documented happenings did not have as large implications for most East Germans. The *MfS*' post and telephone control gave far greater consequences for almost all citizens of East Germany. It was an 'open secret' among the East Germans that opening letters and tapping telephones was being done. That is why it is of utter importance to put a light on these relations, as this unfortunately not has been given as much attention as it perhaps should have had. Therefore, one of the interesting matters to investigate is how it was possible for a secret service as the *MfS* to control the population and what it managed to do. All this existed under the roof of a republic that claimed to be democratic. Another issue to address is to map the mechanisms that guaranteed the work of these Departments.

It will be too large a piece to illustrate the whole of the *MfS*' work by looking at all its units completing their control measures.[11] Therefore, in regards to this part, the main issues when considering the control of the post and telephone traffic will concern the two mentioned Departments the *MfS* used in order to control the population through these means. To recapitulate, these Departments were, respectively, Department M; Post Control and Department 26; Telephone Surveillance. Those Departments controlled as much post and telephone traffic as they were able to. This meant having the potential to observe nearly every sort of communication done within this area of the GDR. It was made sure to put a tone on the GDR in the former sentence, since the *MfS* and these Departments to some extend also fulfilled such work, which only operated beyond the borders of the GDR. The approach of the thesis in terms of such matters, however, aims to treat the control that was linked to execution within the GDR. The focus of time treats the period from the founding of the *MfS* until its collapse,

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[11] "Unit" in this sense relates to any organised group of the *MfS*, whether large, small, 'less', or 'more' important, existing on any level of the Ministry.

i.e., 1950-1989.[12]

Without anyhow anticipating the course of the events, it is doubtless that these two Departments played a vital part for the GDR and *MfS*. As such departments presumably are of importance to the secret services of today, including the majority of states, they certainly were in those days as well. Since this most likely happens to be the case, it is therefore more important to look closer at the particular actions that relate to the chosen angle. The essential is to find out the settings of the *MfS*, and from there follows the logical questions that are to give answers to the 'who's, what's, where's', etc. In other words, some of the important reasons the *MfS* presumably had for using these Departments were, first of all, based on that in any modern society using the post and telephone were - and still are - considered as the most effective and rational ways of communicating. Secondly, trying both to use and control these ways of communicating for this secret service's own benefits should have resulted in a great part of the people's communication patterns having been observed by the *MfS*. Alternatively, at least, the *MfS* had built up such an enormous network, which had the potential to observe anyone. An example of this would be the Ministry quite frequently having used these two Departments as two of the largest supportive units for contributing and completing tasks that were given to them by other units of the *MfS* in the first place. In other words, the Departments M and 26 mainly operated in cooperation with other units, since these two Departments were considered as so-called mission-taking/receiving units. That is, based upon what was ordered from the mission-giving units. However, additionally, in order for example to develop and renew their work, tasks and so forth, these Departments also fulfilled work settled within their organisation albeit not in the same range as their main tasks. Besides, these Departments were so much more than what their classifiable names may tell. Since for example the Department 26, although having been named with the additional category "Telephone Surveillance", not only executed the controls of phone calls. As we shall see later, it for example also accomplished tasks such as

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[12] 17 November 1989 the GDR's new state leader, *Ministerpräsident* (Prime Minister) Hans Modrow, declared that the *MfS* should stop to exist and change name to *Amt für Nationale Sicherheit, AfNS* (Office for National Security). This organ lasted from November 1989 until December 1989 (D. Gill & U. Schröter, *Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit. Anatomie des Mielke-Imperiums*. 1. Auflage. Berlin 1991, p. 177; B. Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance in Unified Germany*. London and New York 1999, p. 5). 1 December 1989 the GDR's *Volkskammer* (People's Chambers) dismissed Article 1 in the constitution, which ended the ruling party's, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*', *SED*'s (Socialist Unity Party of Germany's), leading role in the state. 16 December 1989 the *SED* changed name to the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus, PDS* (Party of Democratic Socialism), under the leadership of the newly elected Gregor Gysi. 23 August 1990, the GDR's People's Chambers voted for unification with the FRG. 3 October 1990 the two German states formally became one state, called FRG. For further comments to the treatment, see the discussion of the sources and methods below.