Twenty-Five Years Later:
Memory Culture and Political Controversy over the Legacy of East Germany
A Symposium

with

Mario Röllig, former Stasi victim; eye witness guide at Stasi Memorial Prison Berlin-Hohenschönhausen
Ralph Kabisch, former tunnel builder & escape helper in Berlin; eye witness guide at Berlin Wall Memorial
Prof. Mary Beth Stein, Department of Romance, German, and Slavic Languages/IERES, GWU
Prof. Hope M. Harrison, Department of History/IERES, GWU

This event will be moderated in the morning by Professor Peter Rollberg (Director, IERES) and in the afternoon by Dr. Christian Ostermann (Director, History and Public Policy Program / Cold War International History Project, Wilson Center)

This symposium brings together two eye witnesses and two professors discussing East Germany, the Berlin Wall, and the East German secret police, the Stasi. In the morning, Mario Röllig (10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.) will discuss life in East Germany, his failed escape attempt and subsequent imprisonment by the Stasi, and Ralph Kabisch (11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.) will share his experience of being part of a group of university students in West Berlin who built a tunnel under the Berlin Wall which helped 57 people escape from East Berlin. In the afternoon session, Prof. Mary Beth Stein (12:40 p.m. - 1:20 p.m.) will present her research on controversies surrounding the legacy of the Stasi, and the efforts by its victims and by historians to remember and educate the public at one memorial museum in Berlin. Prof. Hope M. Harrison (1:20 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.), who will have just returned from Berlin as a participant in the official celebrations surrounding the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, will discuss the evolution of Germany’s approach to the history and memory of the Berlin Wall since 1989.

Mario Röllig was born in East Berlin in 1967 and tried to escape in 1987, but was caught and imprisoned for several months, after which he was harassed by the Stasi (who were also hostile to his homosexuality) and finally allowed to leave the country in 1988. After fleeing the Soviet occupation zone of Germany with his parents during World War II, Ralph Kabisch grew up in West Germany, attended the Technical University of (West) Berlin and together with other students helped build the famous Tunnel 57 under the Berlin Wall in 1964 for which he was awarded the Federal Order of Merit in 2012. Professor Mary Beth Stein has published numerous articles on Berlin and the Berlin Wall and is currently working on a book on East German life histories. Professor Hope M. Harrison has written an award-winning book on the building of the Berlin Wall (Driving the Soviets up the Wall, Princeton, 2003) and is completing a book on the German historical memory of the Wall (After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany, 1989 to the Present, Cambridge, forthcoming 2015).

This symposium is co-sponsored by the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies; the Department of History; the Columbia College of Arts and Sciences; and the Department of Romance, German, and Slavic Languages and Literatures at the George Washington University. It is presented in cooperation with the Embassy of Germany and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Friday, November 14, 2014
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Lindner Family Commons
1957 E St. NW, Room 602
Please RSVP at http://go.gwu.edu/twentyfive