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Dr. Andrea Mehrländer  
Geschäftsführende Direktorin  
Checkpoint Charlie Stiftung  
Wolfensteindamm 9  
12165 Berlin  
GERMANY

Dear Dr. Mehrländer:

I am delighted to have been invited to participate in the October 2007 Travel Program for American Colleagues from Parliamentary and Government Libraries (arranged by the Initiative Fortbildung ... and funded by the Checkpoint Charlie Stiftung) and to report on its success. What a perfectly fulfilling experience from a professional and personal standpoint! In my lengthy professional career, I've been fortunate to participate in many library and law-related professional development activities, but have never felt more rewarded than upon concluding this one.

Berlin was the perfect place to begin and to stay a few days. The activities there were designed to give us a good framework for what was to follow; we left Berlin with an enhanced sense of German history and place. Michael Cullen offered an insider's tours of Berlin (an organized, off-the-beaten-path bus tour plus a Reichstag rooftop tour), entertaining and educating us with his anecdotal approach. I was moved by the Track 17 memorial in Grunewald, and grateful to experience it. In the same vein, I am also grateful that Evelin Morgenstern shared so much of "her" Berlin and other cities with us in unscheduled walks and talks during our few free times. These were invaluable parts of the tour experience, as were the meals and other informal times we were fortunate to share with our colleagues in Berlin and elsewhere.

And how to describe the impact of the Stasi Archiv visit or our glimpse into the restoration of Dresden or the Bavarian State Library's "Corner of Grief" or visits to the European Court of Human Rights and German courts? Again, these experiences offered the perfect historical context for the current information landscape in Germany. In general, I was struck by how the modern political situation has moved from closed to open, dark to light, hidden to displayed – and how this is reflected in the information

services world, with its focus on open records and access, and even in architectural changes for libraries and government buildings.

As a legislative librarian, I was initially most interested in the parliamentary information services model. (This changed as I became “most interested” in whatever we were doing at the time!). In the United States, each state has at least one library serving the legislature, but they operate on many different models, some located within the state legislature, some in the state libraries or archives, and some within other branches of government. Hence, we have no uniform model. I was impressed with the focused missions of the several parliamentary libraries we visited, and – despite admitted differences – found my own experiences validated by the sharing of information with those librarians. For example, we all face the challenges of whether and how extensively to collect, index, digitize or share resources; how to balance access with preservation in the most cost effective way possible; how to remain neutral politically; how to sustain an effective frontline presence; and how to develop staff and maintain strong networks even as resources for libraries seem to shrink.

Our visits to other types of libraries and information services confirmed that legislative librarians are not alone in these challenges, and we were shown methods of addressing some of these concerns. For example, the digitization demonstrations at the Sächsische Landesbibliothek– Staats–und Universitätsbibliothek (SLUB), the archival and digitization programs at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (including the magnificent scanner robot!), and the description of moving from paper to web–based documents at the Deutsches Patent–und Markenamt (DPMA) and the European Court of Human Rights were all very informative.

The DPMA visit was also enlightening with Hubert Rothe’s description of the agency’s 2005 reorganization, which showed just how the world is changing for libraries and how important it is to market themselves or lose out to other information services. And, just as the Berlin phase of our tour offered historical and cultural context, Max Planck’s Peter Weber provided current research context with his outstanding presentation on the research landscape in Germany.

The itinerary was beautifully planned and executed, with a good balance between federal and state agencies, parliament and other government services, library and other information services, public and private institutions, and – of course – work and fun. From our first meeting over dinner at Berlins’ Theodor Tücher Am Tor, it was clear this would be a gemütlich group, and our experiences bore that out, right down to the camaraderie of the farewell dinner in Karlsruhe. With representatives of state and federal libraries/information services, the American group had a variety of backgrounds and experiences; I learned quite a bit from them all and have certainly broadened my network.

In that regard, I might suggest a more formal introductory meeting on the first morning after the first night's dinner, ahead of getting together with German colleagues. Once the tour began in earnest, there was simply no time to arrange a formal gathering for this and it would have been useful. I would caution against any inclination to shorten this program or to eliminate any region of Germany. Indeed, my only wish that things had been otherwise was to have an additional day in Dresden. If adding a day is impossible, perhaps the Historisches Grünes Gewölbe tour could be one option among others.

I've hesitated to name many names at all in this report, as every single person we encountered was welcoming, professional, and helpful. My thanks goes to each and every one of our German colleagues who participated. But I simply can't say enough about Evelin Morgenstern's professional and graceful handling of this wonderful tour. She is simply exceptional. Though much can go wrong with fast-moving groups such as ours, not a single thing did. And Christine Wellems was the perfect traveling companion – her good humor, professional insights and translation services made an already excellent program better.

Given the CCS purpose of fostering German-American relations and the Initiative's leading role in the professional development of specialized librarians, this program was unqualifiedly successful. I am most grateful to CCS for its funding and to both organizations for the opportunity to participate in such a beneficial program. I stand ready to assist with future professional development programs, or simply to connect with German colleagues.

And last but not least, it was a pleasure to meet you. With your kind help, I no longer "still have a suitcase in Berlin." But I can assure you I left part of me there, just as I brought part of Germany home with me. Perhaps I can return soon to reunite the parts!

With kindest regards,

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