

March 31, 2005

**Press Release about the Alleged MfS Evidence
regarding the Assassination Attempt on the Pope
from 1981**

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Summary:

Documents from the Stasi archives on the anti-Bulgarian campaign surrounding the investigation of the assassination attempt.

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The Federal Commissioner
For the Files of the State Security Service
Of the Former German Democratic Republic
-Press Office-

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Press Release

About the alleged MfS Evidence Regarding the Assassination Attempt on the Pope
from 1981

In light of various reports in the Italian, Bulgarian, and other media, we would like to inform you about the complex as follows:

On March 3, 1994, a letter from the Italian Criminal Court was transmitted to the German government, which requested relevant information in the MfS files.

From 1994 to 1996, the Roman investigators received information and copies of files from the MfS records regarding the alleged suspects, possible witnesses and the reactions of the MfS to the attempted assassination. These declarations drew on the information of the Main Department XXII of the MfS (Defense Against Terrorism), which had collected these after the assassination attempt based on newspaper reports, their own insights and intelligence-based insights from the Western state of investigations. In February 1996, the Italian investigators were able to take a picture of the state of the files personally at the BtSU in Berlin.

During the year 1995, an additional file element from the Department X was discovered, which was responsible for contact with the socialist secret services, that was clearly meant to be destroyed by the MfS and was partially torn up. These files contained correspondence between the MfS and the Bulgarian secret service from the years 1982 to 1985 as well as correspondence from Dept. X with other MfS Departments, in particular the HVA (espionage section of the MfS). The starting point was the request from the Bulgarian side to the MfS to assist in the defense against the "campaign directed by the intelligence services of the enemy which have the goal of discrediting Bulgaria." It is to be taken from the expression of gratitude from the Bulgarian side that the Disinformation Section of the MfS became active according to expectations. Formulations like "Operation Pope" and "active measures" appear in the files. Such formulations may not be a reason for over interpretation, however. From the perspective of the BtSU, these records contain references that the MfS obtained and spread information which should counter the suspicion that the Bulgarian side and the KGB were embroiled in the assassination attempt and which, on the other hand, were calculated to expose the CIA as the alleged originator of a corresponding smear campaign in the Western media.

These records of the Dept. X of the MfS were made available not only to the Italian investigators but also to many journalists since the mid-1990s. In the context of a research proposal from 2002 of the then Bulgarian government commission regarding the opening of the records of State Security Services, these records were also transmitted to Bulgaria.

Since 1996, no further records regarding this group of topics were given to the Italian investigative bodies.

From the perspective of the BtSU, there arise no clear findings regarding the involvement of the MfS, the Bulgarian secret service and the KGB in the assassination attempt on the Pope in 1981. Whether this presents itself differently in light of witness statements or other documents which are not in the possession of the BtSU escapes our jurisdiction.

The corresponding records can be examined in the context of media requests on the topic of "The Collaboration of the MfS with other secret services in the wake of the assassination attempt on the Pope."

Christian Booß, Press Spokesman