Introduction

In July 1967, Erich Mielke was handed a report on Frank Ryan. As a former veteran of the Spanish Civil War, the head of the Stasi was immediately interested by the case of this IRA man who had volunteered to serve in the International Brigades in Spain to fight against the fascist Franco. It might have reminded him of his good self. The report was all about repatriating Ryan’s remains, buried in a cemetery in Dresden, to Ireland. At first sight, there was nothing wrong with handing over the body of a former comrade to his family. But there was a problem: why had Ryan been buried in Nazi Germany in 1944? And so began the extraordinary story of the process of establishing diplomatic relations between the German Democratic Republic (GDR), or East Germany, and Ireland, which must be unique in the annals of the history of diplomacy. In the East German Ministry of External Affairs, it became known as ‘corpse diplomacy’. Ryan could never have imagined that one day he would be at the centre of Irish–East German relations, nor that he would also become the main source of inspiration for a well-written East German political thriller in which the Stasi agents were the heroes.

The same year, ‘Bettina’ joined the Stasi. The person would remain known under this cover name as the 39 million index cards in the archive of the former Stasi in Berlin do not reveal the person’s identity, just a registration number: XV/92/67. ‘Bettina’ was active in the Bonn area, the former capital of the former West Germany. What is known is that ‘Bettina’ was a member of a Stasi unit that targeted ministries including the department of telecommunications of the West German army, the Bundeswehr. This provides a vital clue and explains where ‘Bettina’ in all likelihood obtained a plan for the extension of the Irish telephone network in 1983. ‘Bettina’ might also know what this plan was doing in West Germany. ‘Fichte’ was another agent whose name could not be established, except for the registration number, XV/1762/71. This is a pity because if ‘Fichte’ is still alive, he or she might have accepted
to say how the pump and turbine plans of Poolbeg Generating Station, also known as Pigeon House, near Dublin were obtained in 1969. There was as well this mole in the Belgian Foreign Ministry in Brussels, ‘Angestellter’. This civil servant transmitted to East Berlin Belgian documents on Ireland and Northern Ireland. According to former East German spies, ‘Angestellter’ was particularly active and good.

In the 1980s, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) began a bombing campaign against the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). A handful of Irish migrants living in West Germany appeared to support the PIRA and also the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). There was an association called Westdeutsches Irlandsolidaritätskomitee, the West German Ireland Solidarity Committee (WISK), based not far way from Frankfurt am Main. What were its activities? Soon the Stasi found out pretty much everything there was to know. In 1986, HA-XXII, the Stasi department in charge of terrorism, found out that the PIRA was about to buy arms in the town of Ferlach in Austria. A major source of information for the Stasi on PIRA activities in West Germany were the different police institutions in West Germany which it had seriously infiltrated. So it was that it got wind of an anti-PIRA operation led by the West German federal police code-named ‘Operation HARP’ in 1989.

Due to legal considerations and the protection of third persons, the archive of the former Stasi in Berlin often blacks out names in documents that are given to researchers. There was no exception for this book, but the archive did send the author one document without blacked-out passages containing the name of an Irish individual who, according to information collected by the Stasi, was meant to initiate contacts between the PIRA and the Venezuelan terrorist Carlos ‘the Jackal’ who was then a regular visitor to East Berlin and other Eastern European capitals. The Romanian intelligence services too had contacts with Carlos and at least on one occasion set up an arms deal between the Carlos group and the PIRA somewhere in the suburbs of Bucharest.

The above stories are snippets of information contained in the 6,000 photocopies that the Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (BStU, the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic, Stasi) in Berlin sent to me. Research for this book was not hampered by the thirty-year restriction rule on archives which does not apply as far as Stasi material is concerned. This is most definitely a very rare commodity in the field of history, let alone in the field of intelligence studies. Indeed, if there is one aspect for which the Cold War is famously known it is
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espionage. When I was contemplating a research project on the relations between Ireland and the GDR, I considered possible sources and contacted the BStU to ask if there was any relevant material concerning Ireland and Northern Ireland. Once my identity was established and when I was vetted, as it were, the BStU was willing to undertake the research for me in the gigantic and labyrinthine archive left by the Stasi. My approach was straightforward: I asked the BStU to send me photocopies of all original documents containing the words Ireland, Northern Ireland, Irish, Ulster, Dublin, Belfast, Irish Republican Army, Irish National Liberation Army and so on, and also the names of several individuals. The research took over three years in total and yielded over 6,000 photocopies. The Stasi material was in turn complemented by documents, notably from the Soviet military intelligence, found in the Bundesarchiv-Militäarchiv (the German military archive) in Freiburg am Breisgau where the papers of the former East German military intelligence are located.

The idea to do research on Ireland during the Cold War, a rather under-researched area, began in 2006 when I became the main researcher for a project entitled ‘Ireland and European Integration in a Comparative International Context, 1945–1973’, financed by the IRCHSS (Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences) and under the supervision of Professor (emeritus) Dermot Keogh of the School of History in University College, Cork (UCC). The aim of this project was to analyse Ireland’s relations with the founding member states of the European Communities (EC) at political, economic and cultural levels. While in Germany, I began to toy with the idea of also researching a project on Ireland’s relations with a country behind the Iron Curtain, the former GDR. I envisaged studying Ireland’s relations with East Germany on the same lines as the IRCHSS project, namely focusing on political, economic and cultural levels.

Why the GDR in particular? Relations between Ireland and Germany throughout the twentieth century have been the object of several studies. For example, in 2008 I published a book called The Irish Factor, 1899–1919: Ireland’s Strategic and Diplomatic Importance for Foreign Powers, in which I developed the relations between Imperial Germany and Ireland. The inter-war period was analysed by Mervyn O’Driscoll in Ireland, Germany and the Nazis: Politics and Diplomacy, 1919–1939. Germany’s relations and attempts to influence the Irish republican movement against Britain during the Second World War was first studied by Enno Stephan in 1965 in his book Spies in Ireland, and then by Mark M. Hull in 2003 in Irish Secrets: German Espionage in Wartime Ireland 1939–1945. Post-war relations
between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), or West Germany, and Ireland have been analysed by O’Driscoll in *Ireland through European Eyes: Western Europe, the EEC and Ireland, 1945–1973*, O’Driscoll being a member of the said IRCHSS project team. The very active Centre for Irish–German Studies in the University of Limerick has done much work on cultural and literary contacts between the two countries like for example Joachim Fischer’s *Das Deutschlandbild der Iren 1890–1939* (the image the Irish had of Germany, 1890–1939). So, this left the GDR to complete Ireland’s relations with the Germanys during the twentieth century.

Books and articles on Ireland’s involvement in the Cold War are not that many. Dermot Keogh’s ‘Ireland, the Vatican and the Cold War: The Case of Italy, 1948’ gives an in-depth insight on how the Irish Catholic Church and government made their contribution in helping the Christian Democrats to defeat the Communists during the Italian general election. Bernadette Whelan’s authoritative study *Ireland and the Marshall Plan, 1947–57* relates how Ireland benefited from and responded to Washington’s plan to assist Western Europe in its economic recovery and avoid the spreading of Communism. In *A Diplomatic History of Ireland 1948–49: The Republic, the Commonwealth and NATO*, Ian McCabe meticulously analyses Ireland’s decision not to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Till Geiger’s ‘Trading with the Enemy: Ireland, the Cold War and East–West Trade, 1945–1955’ is a ground-breaking study of Ireland’s trade relations with countries behind the Iron Curtain during the early years of the Cold War. Eilís Ward examines the arrival of Hungarian refugees in Ireland after the failed uprising in Budapest in “A Big Show-off to What We Could Do”: Ireland and the Hungarian Refugee Crisis of 1956’. It proved difficult for the Irish authorities to organise the stay of the refugees.

Frank Aiken’s finest hour as he was largely at the origin of this treaty, signed in Moscow in July 1968. The Soviets had much respect for him.

For the later period of the Cold War, Robert McNamara has studied the Irish government’s attitude towards the conflict in Vietnam in ‘Irish Perspectives on the Vietnam War’\(^\text{16}\). He concludes that the Irish had become far less idealistic as they used to be and that they largely adopted a pro-American stance, more reflective of NATO member states than of a neutral country. It certainly was a reflection of Ireland’s tough anti-Communist stance. The country might well have been neutral but was definitely pro-NATO as Taoiseach Seán Lemass had made clear in the 1960s when his government made the decision to apply for membership of the European Economic Community (EEC). Despite Lemass and his successors’ pro-West declarations, Trevor Salmon takes a critical look at the country’s defence relationship with Britain and NATO in ‘The Changing Nature of Irish Defence Policy’\(^\text{17}\). He essentially argues that Ireland had to become more realistic about existing and emerging threats, and jettison some of its stubborn neutrality. In a very valuable chapter entitled ‘Northern Ireland, NATO and the Cold War’\(^\text{18}\), Geoffrey R. Sloan assesses the strategic value of the island. He stresses the vital role of Northern Ireland for NATO and also that some British strategists believed that Ireland was defenceless and thus constituted a gap in NATO’s defence. Opinions on Northern Ireland’s strategic value fluctuated during the Cold War but in 1972 the British government was adamant that the ‘Troubles’ should not pose a security threat to Britain and present an opportunity for a foreign power to destabilise the United Kingdom. As this book shows, that was precisely what the Soviets wanted to do in 1972 during the KGB’s ‘Operation SPLASH’. Patrick Keatinge has made regular contributions on Ireland’s foreign relations in *Irish Studies in International Affairs* which provide valuable insights\(^\text{19}\).

Regarding bilateral relations between Ireland and Eastern European countries, Stephen White in ‘Ireland, Russia, Communism, Post-Communism’\(^\text{20}\) details the beginning of the relations between Ireland, the Irish Free State as it was known back then, and the Soviet Union. He writes that over the decades the Soviet Union was more or less interested in Ireland, but that under Leonid Brezhnev’s leadership (1964–82) interest in the country was definitely being revived owing to the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. The Soviets were of the opinion that the origins of the conflict were purely economic and that it was a colonial war. The PIRA was not liked in Moscow as it was deemed to be inspired by ‘religious fanaticism and anti-communism’. According to the Soviets, only the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) had the answer...
to the problem, but Soviet patience and support for the CPI eventually petered out. In ‘The Soviet Union in Irish Foreign Policy’, Michael Ó Corcora and Ronald J. Hill explore the establishing of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Ireland, and also issues of Irish public opinion towards Moscow. The Irish people were rather apathetic or suspicious and the Irish Church was vehemently anti-Communist. By and large, the Irish trade union movement was not supportive of the Soviet Union, but economic lobbies, like the farmers, eventually pressured the government into opening trade links with the Soviets. Generally, Ireland did not particularly like the Soviet Union as it considered this country to be a colonial power with a hold over Eastern Europe. Eventually, the decision to open diplomatic relations was taken in 1973.

Gabriel Doherty has written a detailed study of Ireland’s food aid programme to an economically stricken Poland in the early 1980s at a time when that country was rocked by political events that were the creation of the independent trade union Solidarność (Solidarity) in which Lech Wałęsa played a key role and the subsequent coup d’état led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski. Doherty describes Ireland’s efforts with the European Community as being motivated by humanitarian, development and security concerns. Included is an analysis of Irish policy towards Poland between 1921 and 1980.

The opening of diplomatic relations between Ireland and the GDR occurred in 1980 at a time when East–West tensions increased seriously. Damian Mac Con Uladh has written two pioneering studies. In ‘The Poor Relations: The GDR and Ireland’, he pertinently argues that to get a good understanding of Irish–East German relations it is necessary to go further than just focusing on diplomacy and foreign policy. Relations between the Socialist Unity Party (SED), or the East German Communist party, and the CPI played a central role, as did exchanges between so-called Friendship societies in the two countries and also trade. In a chapter entitled ‘The GDR and Northern Ireland’, Mac Con Uladh explains that the GDR considered the Northern Irish conflict to be a colonial struggle. The PIRA’s strategy and outlook was strongly condemned by the East German media although it did support Bobby Sands and the hunger strikes of 1980–81 as the CPI had decided to support them. The Protestant/unionist community was systematically described as being reactionary and right-wing.

As previously mentioned I decided to take the same approach as in the IRCHSS project and analyse East-German–(Northern) Irish relations at political, economic and cultural levels, initially believing that the amount of available primary sources would be rather limited.
I considered my sources and found more material than anticipated in the National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, the Irish military archive in Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, the archives of the Communist Party of Ireland in the Gilbert Library, Dublin, the Dublin Diocesan Archive, the Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (Foundation Archives of Parties and Mass Organisations of the GDR in the Federal Archive), Berlin, the Auswärtiges Amt-Politisches Archiv (archive of the German Foreign Office), Berlin, the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv (archive of German broadcasting), Potsdam-Babelsberg, the Evangelisches Zentralarchiv (archive of the Evangelical Church in the former GDR), Berlin, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (archive of the German Christian-Democratic Party), Sankt Augustin, the Regionalarchiv Ordinarien Ost (archive of the Catholic Church in the former GDR), Erfurt, and the online newspaper archive of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz Zeitungsinformationssystem. Also, there was relevant material in the archive of NATO in Brussels, which has been declassified, and in the online archive of the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), to my mind a model for other intelligence agencies to adopt if ever they decide to make their files available to research, which is not a foregone conclusion.

As is well known, for a very long time Ireland was considered to be a springboard for an attack on Britain by foreign continental powers, that is to say Spain, France and Germany. In the *Irish Factor, 1899–1919*, I portrayed some of the intelligence activities of the Germans and the French. Reinhard R. Doerries wrote about Imperial Germany’s support for the Irish republicans during the First World War, especially about the relations between the Germans and Roger Casement. As shown above, Enno Stephan and Mark M. Hull concentrated on German intelligence activities during the Second World War. Eunan O’Halpin, a leading expert in intelligence and security issues in Ireland, wrote extensively on intelligence issues within an Anglo-Irish-American context. By contrast, spying activities involving (non-English speaking) foreign powers regarding Ireland and Northern Ireland during the Cold War have remained largely unexplored. In that sense, this book offers a totally new insight.

From a German point of view, this study is rather original. As Wolfgang Krieger points out, there has been but little interest shown in the history of German intelligence. In fact, he speaks of ‘neglect’ and attributes this to several reasons. Unlike the American CIA, the security and intelligences services of Germany, or the former West Germany, have not declassified material. Also, there is the particular
'psychological atmosphere' in Germany. After the Second World War, military and security studies were neglected and frowned upon by some political quarters. Moreover, Krieger writes that ‘it is understandable that the Germans associated war so extensively with death, destruction and humiliation’ unlike the Anglo-Saxons, which explains why in the United States and the United Kingdom war and intelligence studies are much more popular. But Krieger stresses that there is one exception: studies on the Stasi. Excellent books have been produced since the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, he explains that most studies are confined to the Stasi’s activities within East Germany.\textsuperscript{28} Yet, the Stasi most definitely ventured abroad. As Jens Gieseke, an expert on the history of the Stasi, writes, its main target abroad was first and foremost West Germany.\textsuperscript{29}

Owing to the important mass of primary sources I decided to focus especially on East German intelligence activities, hence the title of this book. The following structure was adopted. Part I is entitled ‘Relations between Ireland and East Germany’. It is an analysis of the political, economic and cultural links between the two countries, and also perceptions and portrayals by the media. For example, how did the \textit{Irish Times}, the \textit{Irish Independent} and the \textit{Irish Farmers Journal} describe life behind the Berlin Wall? Was it all negative? In turn, what did \textit{Neues Deutschland}, \textit{Neue Zeit}, \textit{Berliner Zeitung} and the \textit{Weltbühne} think of Irish culture and what attitude did they adopt towards Bloody Sunday in (London)Derry in 1972 and the hunger strikes in Northern Ireland in the early 1980s? The East German television sent journalists to report not only on the conflict in Northern Ireland but also on the socio-economic conditions in Ireland. Was it all propaganda? A handful of Irish idealists settled in the GDR and attention is paid to their activities. The activities of the Ireland–GDR Friendship Society are also examined.

A large section is devoted to the long and extraordinary process of establishing diplomatic relations between Ireland and the GDR. It had become a point of honour, if not an obsession for the East German leader, Erich Honecker. The unpublished manuscript of Edgar Uher, a former East German diplomat and HVA (the Stasi’s foreign intelligence department) officer gives a unique insight into what happened behind the scenes. The eventual opening of official diplomatic relations in 1980 did not bring about a much needed change in the balance of trade between the two countries as Dublin had hoped. For decades, Ireland’s balance of trade with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was negative. The reasons why are explored. Another interesting issue is the uneasy \textit{ménage à trois} that developed between Honecker’s SED, the CPI
and Sinn Féin/the Workers’ Party (SF/WP). The Soviets had told the East Germans to drop the CPI and focus on SF/WP as this party looked more promising from an electoral point of view. How did East Berlin handle this delicate situation as it was on very good terms with the CPI leader, Michael O’Riordan?

Although the book is divided into two parts, the parts are connected as the Stasi was omnipresent, be it in assessing PIRA activities and getting confidential documents on the one hand, or reviewing a book based on Frank Ryan’s life, analysing media duels between East and West Germany concerning Northern Ireland and reporting words of Irish businessmen visiting the Leipzig Fair on the other hand.

In Part II, attention is focused solely on intelligence activities: reading and listening about Ireland and Northern Ireland; spying on Ireland; recording information on Northern Ireland in the central databank for persons; and watching the PIRA, the INLA and BAOR. Thus, documents and findings are presented in a rather thematic way, except the history of Irish terrorist activities in West Germany. This approach has the advantage of showing how an intelligence service actually operates. The book will no doubt shatter some stereotype notions and clichés. Those who believe that intelligence services are only interested in secret documents, secret invasion plans, secret alliances and so on might be in for a rude awakening. Of course the Stasi was looking for classified and highly sensitive material but not only as the hundreds of press cuttings, the photocopies of books, the transcripts or radio and television broadcasts and so on do testify. There was also industrial espionage like acquiring telephone extension plans and turbine and pump plans, and also assessments of the Irish steel market. It has been possible to identify some of the sources and agents that provided information on Ireland and Northern Ireland, though not all.

In an nutshell, Part II explores the following issues: what kind of information on Ireland and Northern Ireland was obtained; where this information was obtained; who were the people behind the code names and registration numbers of agents and sources; how the obtained information was assessed in East Berlin; how the Stasi watched the activities of Irish terrorists in West Germany and their attacks on BAOR and what were HA-XXII’s assessments of the evolving situation; what were the relations between the PIRA, the INLA, the Red Army Faction (RAF), the Revolutionary Cells, Carlos the Jackal and groups that supported Irish republicans in West Germany like the WISK. Certain Irish and British authors assert that the Stasi might have provided support to the PIRA or the Official IRA (OIRA). These assertions have been investigated and answers are given. The Stasi material sheds
light on this rather forgotten aspect of the Troubles, namely the PIRA’s campaign against BAOR.

The SIRA documents show that there was interaction between the KGB (Committee for State Security, that is to say Soviet intelligence) and the Stasi. SIRA is the acronym for System der Informationsrecherche der Aufklärung (Information Research System of the HVA). The HVA (Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung) was the foreign intelligence department of the Stasi led by the legendary Markus Wolf, known for years in the West as ‘man without a face’, arguably the greatest spymaster ever. Information on Ireland and Northern Ireland was exchanged. But the KGB was not alone in its interest in Irish and Northern Irish affairs in the Soviet Union. There was the GRU also. The latter was the Foreign Military Intelligence of the Soviet Army General Staff. It took a very serious interest in the development of the conflict in Northern Ireland in 1972. The German military archives in Freiburg am Breisgau reveal that the GRU notified East German military intelligence that the conflict was weakening BAOR’s strength. This in all likelihood prompted Yuri Andropov, the then head of the KGB, to agree to send arms to the OIRA as Michael O’Riordan, the very republican leader of the CPI, had been asking for since 1969 according to revelations in Boris Yeltsin’s book, *The View from the Kremlin*. It would seem that the arms were delivered during ‘Operation SPLASH’ at a time when détente was a fashionable word. The archives of the former KGB are out of bounds. However, information on Ireland and Northern Ireland written by defectors or former agents exists. But evidently a clearer picture can only emerge if access to KGB material ever becomes open to research. Emerging also is a rather unexpected Romanian link involving arms deals between the Carlos group and the PIRA. It remains unclear whether it was the Securitate which was behind it or the Departamentul de Informatii Externe (DIE, Department of External Information, or Romanian foreign intelligence).

It is hoped that the reader will be persuaded that Ireland, the island on the fringe of Western Europe, was not without interest for the Stasi.

**Notes**


