

Report: Workshop of the Network for Junior Researchers in Intelligence History Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, 6th January 2012

By Charlotte Backerra and Anne-Simone Rous

On 6th of January 2012, the first workshop of the Network for Junior Researchers in Intelligence History was held in Mainz.

The main emphasis of the workshop lay on reports of the participants on their current projects and on debates on definitions and periodic problems. The exchange of experiences between colleagues in the field of intelligence history was seen as very positive and promising for the future.

Problems in the work with material on intelligence history are diverse, unsatisfactory sources, difficulties in terms of archival restrictions, low willingness of contemporary witnesses to give interviews and so on. Furthermore, „intelligence“ is not a widely accepted topic in German historical sciences. Besides the exchange of experiences and knowledge, it is therefore necessary to discuss terms and concepts of intelligence history.

In the early modern period, written sources on espionage and secret diplomacy are the most important evidence for intelligence of European powers. There are roughly five different sections: nomenclatures for ciphers, coded letters, intercepted communication, non-coded papers on day-to-day activities in secret diplomacy and legal papers on spies.

The personal union of Great Britain and Hanover since 1714 is a promising field for an exemplary examination, because the monarchs governed their combined territories mostly by mail. Interestingly, an institutional and personal cooperation was developed between English and Hanoverian governments especially concerning the secret mail, as Benjamin Bühring explained.

In connection with intelligence history, historians are faced with few source materials, and in such a case, an investigative approach is called for. Because the authors of the sources tried to keep secrets, the historian has to undertake detective work to understand the background and to imagine the ways and intentions of the authors.

Exemplary for this strategy, in the workshop Anne-Simone Rous presented a typical thin legal paper on a spy, consisting of four left documents (order for arrest by the prince, report of the officer, petition of the prisoner, protocol of the interrogation) by different institutions and persons (prince, military, spy, legal system), which could be seen in different ways and offered diverse interpretations. These short statements led to a discussion on the mail system and the gentlemen's agreement of princes regarding the handling of spies.

Anna Abelmann talked about today's practice of restraint by German institutions in terms of information on intelligence activities. Charlotte Backerra introduced definitions of intelligence and their implications in a review of literature, based mainly on definitions by Michael Warner and Wolfgang Krieger. Furthermore, the point on which information must be seen as secret was discussed. The participants placed a focus on the moral implications of secret policy (e.g. trust) and the meaning of writings or the signal of the change to spoken intelligence. Networking and flexibility are constants right through to the 20th century. In addition, the discussion turned to the hierarchy of communication.

An intense exchange of thoughts followed on the gradual development of intelligence, secret agency and intelligence agency on the one hand (Charlotte Backerra, Falko Bell) and a stabile definition of secret diplomacy on the other hand (Anne-Simone Rous).

Differences between secret agencies based on persons or on organisations were a topic as well as the question for the beginning of institutionalized secret policy. Falko Bell found as a minimal consensus, that besides the aspect of information gathering, each intelligence agency has its own characteristics which can be used to find a definition.

The next meeting of the network takes place at the conference of the International Intelligence History Association, *École Militaire*, Paris on 1-3 June 2012 (<http://www.intelligence-history.org>). Interested junior researchers are very welcome to participate and are asked to state their intent with the conference registration.