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Dr. Andrea Mehrländer
Geschäftsführende Direktorin / Executive Director
Checkpoint Charlie Stiftung
Wolfensteindamm 9
12165 Berlin, Germany

Dear Dr. Mehrländer:

It has been almost 2 months since the study tour has concluded, yet I am still basking in the glow of fellowship, good feelings, and intellectual stimulation generated over the 2 weeks spent touring German parliamentary and governmental libraries. For me, the study tour was a serendipitous combination of happy circumstances: a congenial group of colleagues who happened to find themselves traveling, living, and learning together for two weeks; a remarkably efficient, energetic, and empathic tour leader who opened many doors that would have otherwise remained closed; and a rare opportunity to meet a host of library directors and information professionals who shared a common enthusiasm, pride, and excellence in doing their jobs to the best of their abilities. I found the 2 weeks to be the most enjoyable, interesting, and valuable of the “professional development” programs that I have attended during my career. It was a privilege to be invited to participate, but it was an even greater privilege to have actually participated in the study tour.

My perspective may have differed somewhat from some of my colleagues, in that although part of my job involves collecting and compiling information, a large part also includes publishing information products ranging from a governmental almanac to topical informational reports. Consequently, I was most interested in learning the methods used by my German colleagues to organize and disseminate information to policy makers. I found several parts of the program of particular interest in this regard.

First, in general, I found the program to be extremely well organized and designed to maximize the time we had available. Although the schedule was full, there was a good balance between library visits and opportunities to sample Germany’s culture, sights, and cuisine. I thought the balance was exactly right. The logistics, lodging, and meals were handled extremely well, and Evelin Morgenstern’s experience in hosting prior tours was very much in evidence. All aspects of the program, including both the agenda and logistics involved in herding the group throughout Germany, were handled professionally, gracefully, and with great aplomb. Ms. Morgenstern was ably assisted by Dr. Christine Wellems, who led the Hamburg portion of the tour and whose interpreting skills proved to be invaluable to those of us who struggled with the German language.

Although I found the entire agenda worthwhile, there were several programs of particular interest to me. I thought Michael Cullen’s guided tour was fascinating and an excellent way to begin the tour. He was informative and refreshingly opinionated. I was particularly moved by the visit to

Track 17 and its poignant memorial. What I also found most interesting were those libraries that bore little resemblance to the libraries that I was most familiar with. Thus, the archives of the Stasi Records Office and the treasures held by the Saxon State Library were both of great interest. The digitization project at the Bavarian State Library was also particularly relevant, as the University of Wisconsin is also one of the 26 worldwide libraries that have entered into a partnership with Google to digitize their holdings. On a much smaller scale, my own library is involved in digitization and has partnered with the UW to provide Web access to the entire *Wisconsin Blue Book* series from 1853 to the present.

I was also impressed with the overall professionalism and dedication that was so clearly evident in all of our contacts with our German colleagues. The pride that library directors and staff alike had for their libraries was impressive. It also gave me a clearer insight into the motivation and character of Dr. H. Rupert Theobald, the longtime former chief of our Legislative Reference Bureau. Dr. Theobald was a native of Berlin and a graduate of its Freie Universität. When he came to Wisconsin in 1964, he had a journalism degree and no formal training in library science or the law; yet, by the time he concluded his 35-year career at the LRB, he had created a legislative service agency that was a national model. Upon his retirement, the library was renamed the Dr. H. Rupert Theobald Legislative Library, and he was accorded the exceedingly rare honor of having his bas relief portrait installed in the Assembly chamber. It was both a revelation and an inspiration to see a similar dedication, attention to detail, energy, and pride in doing the best job possible in many of the library directors that we met.

I also learned much from my American colleagues on the tour, and have been in touch with several of them. The lines of communication that have been opened as a result can do nothing but strengthen our respective organizations.

Do I have any suggestions for improving the program? Not really. One small suggestion I might offer is to give each participant a few moments at the very beginning of the tour to offer some background about their positions and interests. Although some members of the group had met before, others had not. Perhaps those introductions could take place in an informal setting such as the initial dinner.

Again, I am most grateful to have been afforded this opportunity and for the generosity of the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation in providing the funding. I hope that this relationship can continue, and I am committed to doing everything possible to support future cooperation.

Sincerely,

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