

The Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship in East Germany enjoys a special status within the parliamentary system. She is an ombudswoman for the concerns of the victims of the SED dictatorship and of Communist tyranny. As an auxiliary organ of Parliament, she advises the Bundestag and its committees. In addition, she supports the work of victims' associations and organisations dealing with injustice committed under the SED regime.

[www.bundestag.de/sed-opferbeauftragte](http://www.bundestag.de/sed-opferbeauftragte)



The handover of the first report entitled 'Urgent action needed in support of the victims of the SED dictatorship' to Bundestag President Bärbel Bas on 8 November 2021



The Parliamentary Commissioner on 11 May 2022 attending a meeting with the Legal Affairs Committee chaired by Committee Chairwoman Elisabeth Winkelmeier-Becker



A visit on 8 July 2021 to the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial Centre, at the site of the central pre-trial detention centre used by the GDR State Security Service.



“Over 30 years after the fall of the Wall, action is still needed to support the victims of the SED dictatorship and of political violence in the Soviet Zone of Occupation in East Germany. As Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims, I would like to help bridge the gap between the victims and their associations and policy-makers at Federal level. Nobody who fought for freedom and self-determination within this dictatorship should find themselves socially excluded in our democratic society today. My goal is to help those who suffered as a result of arbitrary rule in the SED dictatorship and, at the same time, raise awareness amongst younger generations of the importance of freedom and human rights.”



Evelyn Zupke,  
Federal Parliamentary  
Commissioner for  
the Victims of the  
SED Dictatorship

## Parliamentary mandate

On 10 June 2021, the Bundestag elected Evelyn Zupke as the first Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship. Her task is to act as an ombudswoman, to engage in political and public advocacy for the victims of the dictatorship in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and under the SED, and to contribute to the recognition and acknowledgment of victims of Communism in Germany. The Commissioner advises the German Bundestag, the Federal Government and public agencies and institutions

on all issues affecting the victims of SED injustice. In addition, she supports the Bundestag in raising awareness regarding the concerns of the victims of Communist tyranny in Europe and at international level. She also works with the victims' associations, the commissioners in the Länder (federal states) who deal with the legacy of the SED dictatorship, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Government Commissioner for Eastern Germany, the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany, as well as advisory centres, archives, memorial sites, research institutes and civil-society initiatives. In public, the Parliamentary Commissioner

creates awareness of the different experiences which people had during the period when Germany was divided, thus fostering understanding within society. The Parliamentary Commissioner performs her functions as an auxiliary organ at the German Bundestag. The Commissioner is elected by Parliament for a term of five years and reports directly to Parliament. She is independent in her work and answerable only to the law. She presents an annual report to the Bundestag on the current situation regarding the victims of the Soviet

Zone of Occupation/SED dictatorship. The Committees of the Bundestag can call on her to compile further reports. In addition, she can decide independently at any time to present positions to Parliament and its committees. She can also participate in the deliberations of the committees where necessary for her work.

The Parliamentary Commissioner gives a voice to those who suffered during the SED dictatorship and the time of the Soviet Zone of Occupation. However, responsibility for individual cases lies with the SED-dictatorship commissioners in the individual Länder, along with other advice and support centres. The Parliamentary Commissioner talks to those affected, learns about their fates and experiences and endeavours to address the injustice they suffered. She is thus able to channel current issues and concerns and communicate them at political level. Since, even more than thirty years after the end of the dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the injustices

committed in the GDR still need to be comprehensively addressed, with a constant awareness of the impacts on the victims. Many people who fought for freedom and self-determination in the GDR became victims of the regime. They became political prisoners, for example, or were placed in detention centres for children and young people, were forcibly adopted, subjected to forced doping, or were victims of psychological methods aimed at breaking them mentally; they suffered disadvantages in their working lives or were expelled from the country. These infringements on their lives have left victims and their families deeply scarred. Many victims of political repression are still today struggling with the dramatic impacts of what they experienced. For the Parliamentary Commissioner, joy at the fall of the Wall and German reunification goes hand in hand with recognition of resistance and opposition in the former GDR and ongoing active support for the victims of SED injustice.

## Rights to access information

In order to carry out her duties, the Parliamentary Commissioner has special rights with regard to information. The rights are enshrined in the Act on the Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship (OpfBG). These rights allow her to view the files of the GDR State Security Service for her expert opinions, reports or statements. On application by the institution carrying out the vetting, she can get involved in vetting procedures carried out under the Act on the Files of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic and also view all files used in such

procedures. In response to an application by the Committee for the Scrutiny of Elections, Immunity and the Rules of Procedure, she can be involved in checks on Members of the Bundestag, thus helping ensure transparency regarding their past. In addition, the public authorities of the Federation and the Länder are required to support the Parliamentary Commissioner – by providing information, for example.

## The work of the Commissioner in Parliament

A great deal has already been achieved for the victims of the SED dictatorship and of Communist rule in the Soviet Zone of Occupation. Nevertheless, much remains to be done, since the need to adjust some instruments may only become clear when they are applied in practice. Whilst other problems – such as trauma or inter-generational issues – may only surface decades later. In discussions with Members of the German Bundestag, the Parliamentary Commissioner is thus advocating for simplification in the current electoral term of procedures for the recognition of

health damage resulting from SED injustice – since victims have often been unsuccessful in this respect so far. In addition, she advocates for unfair gaps to be closed in the laws on rehabilitation, including regarding groups of victims who have so far not been sufficiently taken into account, and for improvements to the social situation of victims, who are often vulnerable to poverty due to disruption caused to their careers. The Commissioner also seeks to ensure that commemoration and remembrance remain relevant in a changing society and calls for the creation of framework conditions for long-term research into SED injustice and its effects. In addition, she seeks to communicate Germany's experience in its approach to the victims of the violence of Communist dictatorships in an international context.

## Evelyn Zupke

Evelyn Zupke was born on 28 February 1962 in Binz. Even at school, she refused to toe the line set by the regime; against the background of her opposition to the regime, she became a social care worker under the auspices of the Protestant Church and, from 1987 onwards, became active in the Weißensee peace circle. In 1989, Evelyn Zupke played a major role in uncovering the first evidence of electoral fraud in the local elections in the GDR on 7 May. After 1989, she was part of the committee responsible for the dissolution of the Office for National Security and at the archive of the Robert

Havemann Society documenting the history of the GDR opposition. Over the past 25 years, she has worked in the area of social care and trauma therapy and visited schools throughout Germany to share her first-hand experience of resistance and the peaceful revolution in the GDR. Since 2020, Evelyn Zupke has been a member of the advisory board of the hardship fund attached to the Berlin SED-dictatorship commissioner. In 2001, she was awarded the Order of Merit of Berlin.

### Information on the Internet

*Information on the Federal Parliamentary Commissioner for the Victims of the SED Dictatorship [in German] can be found on the Bundestag's website at:*  
[www.bundestag.de/sed-opferbeauftragte](http://www.bundestag.de/sed-opferbeauftragte)



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Published by: German Bundestag, Public Relations Division  
Coordination: Dr Elisabeth Heegewaldt, Elmar Ostermann  
Texts: Bettina Korge, Jenny Wojtysiak; editorial advice: Georgia Rauer  
Translated by: Language Service of the German Bundestag  
Design: Nolte Kommunikation, update by: wbv Media, Bielefeld  
Bundestag eagle: Created by Professor Ludwig Gies, revised in 2008 by büro uebele  
Photos: Deutscher Bundestag (DBT)/Inga Haar (portrait); DBT/Thomas Imo/photothek.net (left); DBT/Leon Kügeler/photothek.net (centre); DBT/Julia Nowak/JUNOPHOTO (right)  
Printed by: Druckhaus Waiblingen Remstal-Bote GmbH

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