1 Walter Hallstein as State Secretary
Lothar Lahn

The Foreign Office had been created roughly a fortnight before Walter Hallstein assumed his duties as State Secretary on 2 April 1951. He effectively took over the running of the newest federal ministry, with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer doubling as Foreign Minister.

The ministry had its origins in the Office for Foreign Affairs (Dienststelle für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten), housed in the Federal Chancellery. Now independent, the ministry had to rely on makeshift and very modest accommodation in Bonn for its first few years. A row of private villas on Koblenzer Strasse (a street known today as Adenauerallee), residential buildings and business premises – what remained of them – and the Koenig Museum served as a stopgap.

The new Foreign Office was divided into various directorates-general (Abteilungen), each comprising a number of directorates (Unterabteilungen), which themselves were broken down into divisions (Referate). These were led by directors-general (Abteilungsleiter), directors (Unterabteilungsleiter) and division heads (Referenten), respectively. The now defunct Directorate-General for Countries under Theo Kordt and the Legal Directorate-General run by Professor Kaufmann and Professor Mosler were housed in the Didier-Haus at Bonn’s railway station. This was not far from the notorious Bonner Loch which continues to serve as an example of unsuccessful town planning. The Cultural Directorate-General, under the provisional direction of Counsellor Rudolf Salat, began its work from a wing of the Ermekeil barracks. It was from here that it sought its first contacts abroad. The head of the Political Directorate-General, Herbert Blankenhorn, had his office in Palais Schaumburg (in close proximity to Adenauer and Hallstein), while his staff were located in a shared office at Dahlmannstrasse 7, near the Federal Houses of Parliament and now home to the Parliamentary Society. There, a team under the direction of Counsellor Heinz Julius von Trützschler dealt with the fates of German war criminals and the petitions of their families.

With regard to the organizational re-establishment of the Foreign Office, Adenauer and Hallstein by and large adopted the tried and
tested structure which existed before the war, without, of course, taking on the excrescences of the Third Reich, when the Foreign Office resided in Berlin’s Wilhelmstrasse. In this way, Protocol (a directorate-general), the Central Directorate-General, the Political Directorate-General, the Directorate-General for Countries, the Directorate-General for Trade Policy and the beginnings of a Cultural Directorate-General began to take shape in 1951. But the real nucleus of the Foreign Office – today we would call it the executive staff – remained in close proximity to Adenauer, in Palais Schaumburg.

It was not until 1954, once a new building had been completed for the Foreign Office at Koblenzer Strasse 101, that all directorates-general came together under one roof – an event which was generally well-received. State Secretary Hallstein was able to move into the ministerial wing which he had helped to design. Accompanying him were his staff and the Press Office. When the building was being planned, Hallstein had painstakingly ensured that his intended ground-floor offices – which his successors continue to use – were not the least bit smaller than the offices directly above him, which were intended for a future foreign minister. As a matter of record, from 1955 and until Walter Scheel had the north wing of the ministerial building expanded, Foreign Ministers Heinrich von Brentano, Gerhard Schröder and Willy Brandt actually worked out of a very modest room known as the Bismarck Room, now used for meetings.

With his typical caution and a far-sightedness in weighing up all eventualities, it was mainly Hallstein who managed the personnel policy of the ministry. In filling the most important posts, he always sought the approval of the Chancellor and later of von Brentano, often taking their thoughts and suggestions into consideration. In contrast to Adenauer, Hallstein was not influenced by party-political interests and necessities. However, he willingly followed the instructions of his ‘boss’, for example in filling the ambassadorial post in Bern or the consulate in Houston, Texas, with deserving CDU politicians.

Hallstein sought to restrict the number of former civil servants from the Wilhelmstrasse (the pre-1945 German foreign ministry) employed at the new ministry. He did this not because he was mistrustful (though this character trait was by no means alien to him), but rather because he was fearful of unnecessary and unpleasant complications and discussions which might arise both in Germany and abroad. For those he did take on, he seemed generally satisfied with their professional qualifications, their knowledge of international situations and