

## Stasi love drama causes stir in Germany

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BERLIN (AFP) — A German television film about a political prisoner falling for a Stasi officer drew angry protests ahead of its screening Wednesday for being sympathetic to the hated East German secret police.

Entitled "12 heisst: Ich liebe dich" (12 Means I Love You), it is based on the real-life romance of Regina Kaiser and Uwe Karlstedt, who met and fell in love in 1981 when she was imprisoned by the East German communist regime.

Kaiser and her former interrogator met again after the fall of the Iron Curtain and got married. They have written a book about their relationship.

Historian Hurbertus Knabe, the director of the memorial centre at the former Berlin-Hohenschonhausen prison used by the Stasi, accused ARD channel of commissioning a voyeuristic film that diminishes the suffering of the 200,000 people who were thrown in jail by the secret police.

"This film is going to give millions of people a skewed image of what it was like to be detained by the Stasi," he said in a statement.

"The time the Stasi victims spent in jail were the worst moments of their lives. None of them felt any love for the secret police members who interrogated them."

Der Spiegel magazine reported that eight victims' associations appealed to the company that produced the film, MDR, to stop the film but without success.

Director Connie Walther told the magazine: "Everybody is complaining about a film they have not seen. How could they have formed a fair opinion?"

The film has won praise from newspapers, with the Tageszeitung daily saying it represented a new stage in Germans' collective coming to terms with the country's communist-era division.

It said "initially, after reunification, the way of looking at the Stasi was rather hysterical" but the 2007 Oscar-winner "The Lives of Others" marked a watershed as it "dared to give the Stasi a human face".

The lead actress of "12 Means I love You", Claudia Michelsen, grew up in communist East Germany and said the film made her reject the stereotypes of the period.

"I always had this image that this is a Stasi spy and he is an idiot and this is a victim and deserves pity. But everybody has his own story and the man in this one simply did not know any better," she said.

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