Prospects Concerning the Fulfilment of the Existing Mandates and the Agreed Extension of the Mandates

The Mandate of Assembling

The significance of the acquisition of new personal records for the positive answering of the requests is growing with the continuously increasing number of inquiries. Since the ITS does not have money at disposal for the purchase of documents – that may, in many cases, not even be bought at all – anyway, they are almost exclusively taken over in duplicated form. The discussions about the indemnification fund for forced labourers were – particularly due to the fact that many former persecutees had an opportunity to receive payments for the first time – accompanied by a rapid growth of the willingness to let the ITS have documents. So, for example, the social insurance carriers, upon recommendation of the Federal Data Protection Commissioner, have finally also agreed to place copies of their relevant archival records at disposal for checks in this connection.

In order to achieve a greater success here as well with the limited funds at disposal, but also to guarantee an as simple transfer of the information into the database as possible, a new solution had to be sought urgently in spring 2001. The ITS aimed at replacing the microfilm cameras used up to then by a technology that would permit a simplification and acceleration of the photographing process itself as well as a direct transfer of imaged files into the "electronic archives".

The solution to be chosen had to satisfy the following requirements:

- fast and flexible duplication of the most different documents and files up to A3
- duplication of books and stitched material without damaging them
- use in Germany and abroad, predominantly on the spot at diverse archives
- adaptation of the duplication result during the operation for the immediate import into the electronic archives of the ITS
- quality assurance on the spot
- possibility of making backup copies
- duplicability for the decentralized indexing, cataloguing with headwords
- minimization of the transport weight (incl. data carriers)
- colour photos with authentic colour reproduction

The microfilm camera of the ITS applied so far had to be ruled out for further operations, because

- the transport for every operation was very costly (size and weight),
- the follow-up processing was only to be performed in a very costly and time-consuming manner, and
- it was not possible to carry out a quality assurance on the spot regarding legibility and quality of the photos made.

At that time, there was no equipment available on the market that fulfilled the above-mentioned requirements and could have been used for the imaging of this archival material:

- Flat-board scanners were unsuitable due to the weight and the format, since they were not able to process documents in the form of files and records in A3-format.

- Top-view scanners that would have been able to process documents in the form of files and records in A3-format had to be ruled out due to their lacking transportability.
- Automatic paper feed scanners are unsuitable in principle for the documentary material (e.g. files) to be imaged.

For the purposes of the ITS, therefore, a tailor-made solution had to be found that would do justice to the requirements described above. After a brief specification phase, a solution was finally developed, which was oriented at the general requirements of the imaging of documents and optimized with regard to the special conditions at the ITS. For this, a digital camera of the latest generation was modified in different fields so that it became possible to align the demands of the operational area (e.g. illumination, exposure, picture storage) with a permanent use for the imaging of thousands of documents.

Basis of the solution is a high-resolution digital camera, which may photograph the documents up to the size of A3. By means of a control software particularly developed for this purpose, the produced images are transferred into a notebook computer and adapted electronically there (e.g. turned automatically, lightened etc.). Afterwards, the produced pictures are available for quality assurance purposes and are directly written onto CDs on the spot. The latter will later be transferred into the electronic archives of the ITS together with the respective indexing information and the cataloguing with headwords.

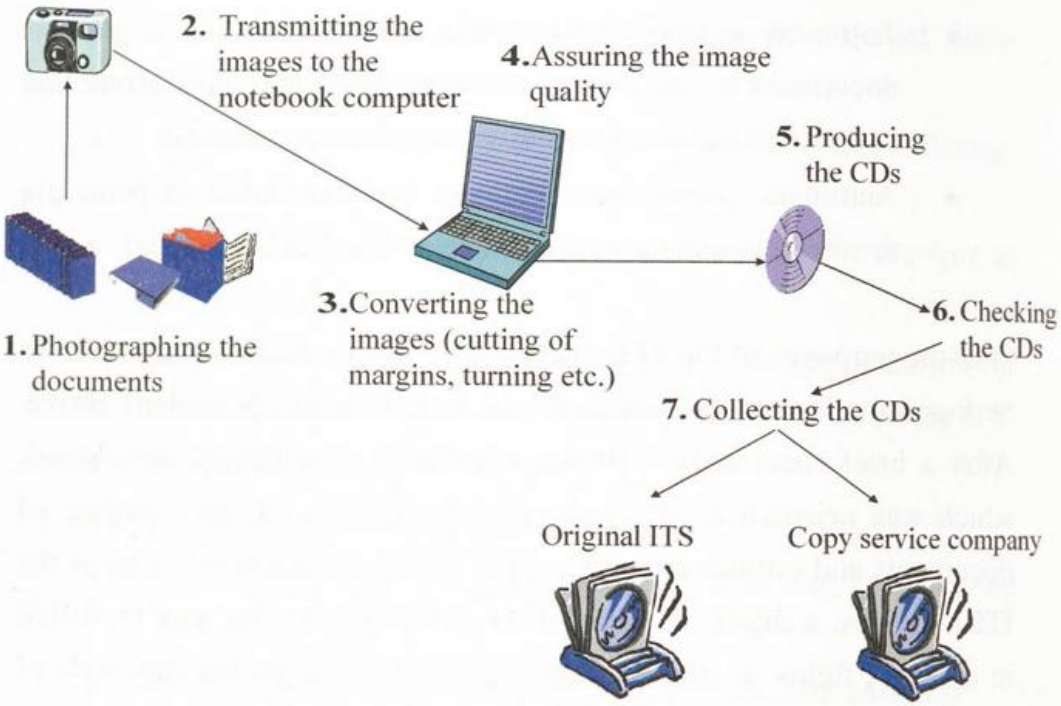

Illustration 12: Digital document acquisition

The current experiences in the practical use have shown that the expectations are met to the full extent.

Considered from an economic point of view, the following savings effects are the result:

- Reduction of time and personnel for the image registration
- Cancellation of the manual follow-up work (development, enlargement respectively scanning of the pictures)
- considerable reduction of material costs (no films, no development chemicals), transport costs

Moreover, the handling is much easier, since the exposure control and focusing are performed automatically now and, this way, two

essential sources of errors that occurred in the handling of the microfilm camera are eliminated.

The solution described here may basically be applied in every place where an electronic transfer of document images is conceivable as, e.g., between different archives or also between archives and third parties.

Since the second half of 2001, the ITS has applied this procedure successfully in Germany and abroad. Depending on the procurement funds at disposal, a complete replacement of the microfilm technology used so far is planned soon.

At the moment, it is possible to get an amount of new material of ca. 750,000 photos (corresponding to roughly 300 linear metres) per year to Bad Arolsen within the scope of the active document acquisition. If the respective funds were placed at disposal, this number could be much higher. Should this come true, it will be vital in the near future to receive as many records as possible with names that are not yet available at the ITS, in order to do justice to the humanitarian task as long as the persons concerned are still alive.

The Mandate of Classification

The introduction of an integral workflow solution also includes the field of classification. Part of this is in any case the card-indexing of the records and correspondence connected with the classic tracing service work. In the last years, the ITS has succeeded, particularly due to the change of the political situation in Eastern Europe, in assembling new personal documentary material about the civilian persecutees of the National Socialist Regime to an increased extent. However, it has not been possible to extend the evaluation of the material – i.e. especially the registration of the personal data of the persecutees concerned for the Central Index of Names – on the same scale. It has only been feasible to make the newly received stock of documents accessible selectively, according to certain priority stipulations. A concurrently growing backlog of work – also in this field – was the inevitable logical consequence.

Many offices understandably attach to their agreement to hand over copies of documents the condition that all inquiries of persecutees arriving there do no longer have to be answered by themselves, but may be forwarded to the ITS for further processing. A condition, which requires that the personal data contained in the records are available for the checks within the shortest possible time.

Since the card-indexing work had already been done electronically for several years, the ITS decided for an ad hoc operation in 2001. In addition to the own employees available, external support was requested for the first time for the registration of the personal data from the not yet evaluated records as well as from the new material to be acquired with priority. The managing board of the Federal Foundation generously declared itself ready to place financial means from a special fund at disposal for this purpose. Until the end of January 2002, this permitted the transfer of far more than half a mil-

lion names into the ITS-database. A significant success, even if a not inconsiderable additional performance by the Tracing Service had to be accepted. The technical integration of an external service company into the work routine illustrated below requires the exact coordination of the transition of the individual steps of work, the controlling and recording of the export of the document copies and of the re-import of the data into the own database, as well as the possibility of a data correction in case of quality deficiencies.

In order to guarantee an optimal use of the available resources here, those documents have been pre-selected that include most probably personal data of persecutees who have not been registered at the ITS so far. Besides this, the efficiency of the measure has been increased by refraining from card-indexing the poorly legible names for the moment in favour of a greater performance.

The sequence of operations and the cooperation in the electronic card-indexing (ITS-internal and outsourcing) are as follows:

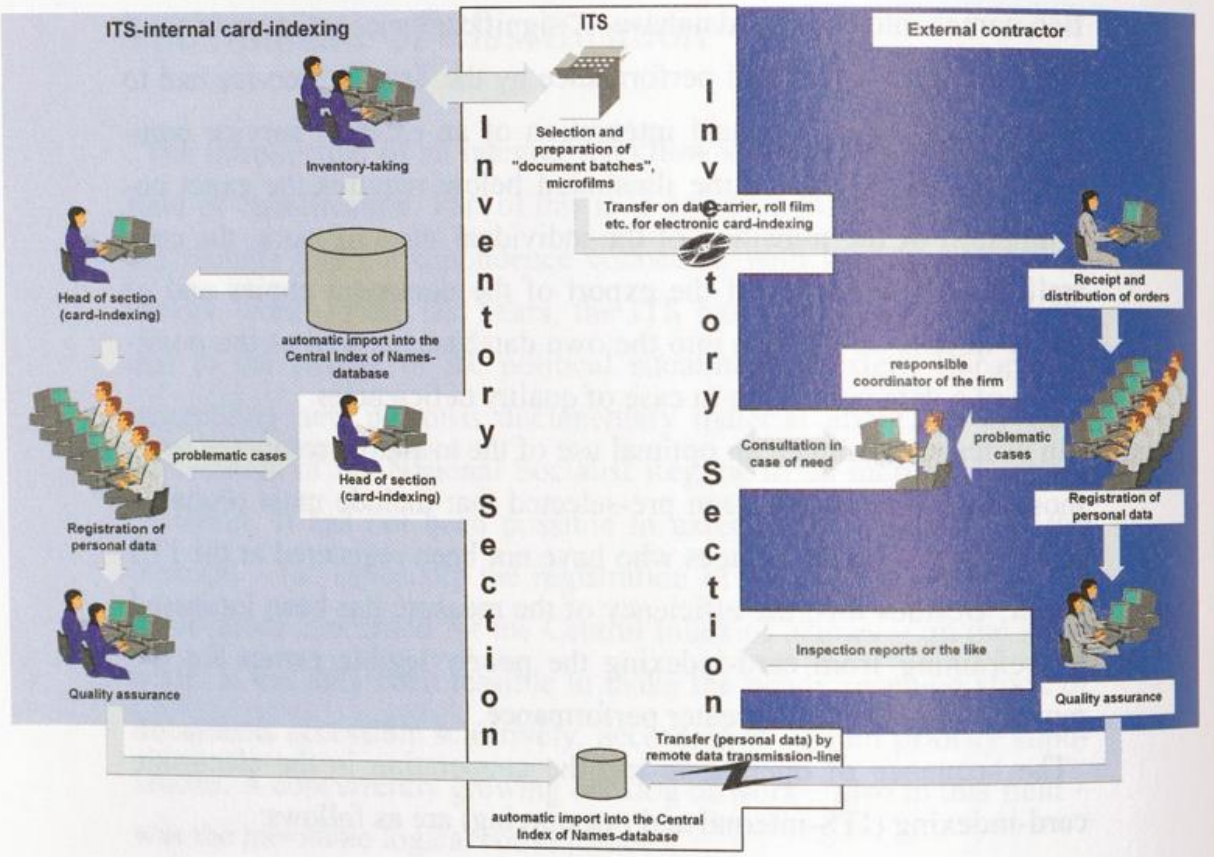

Illustration 13: Electronic card-indexing

In spite of the already achieved conversion of the card-indexing work into a fully electronic procedure and the possibility of involving an external service company created hereby, the problem of the selection of stocks waiting to be taken into the inventory respectively to be card-indexed remains to be solved in the near future. Owing to the fact that the figures of newly received documents have been on a high level already for years, the ITS, with the capacities at disposal, was not able to keep pace in this field. Even though these documents in the "backlog" are consulted for research within the scope of the processing of inquiries according to mandate – the relation is estab-

lished through respective notes in the document acquisition index –, the access to them is still lacking in the short procedure. The advanced average age of the inquirers forces the ITS to exhaust all possibilities, so that the backlog in card-indexing may be reduced as quickly as possible by a selective procedure and with the support of third parties. Without particular efforts in the field, many of today's inquirers would have to accept an avoidable negative answer. A situation that cannot be justified, especially in view of the funds ready for distribution.

The Mandate of Preservation

The available result of the damage analysis concluded in 2000 shows a progressed stadium of decomposition of all objects. If at least the preservation of the unique records is considered to be necessary, immediate conservation and restoration measures are indispensable. By means of a slight intervention in the substance, the creeping loss of material may be stopped. Since there does not exist a uniform type of damage, the most different steps – like the deacidification of the paper or, in individual stocks, the removal of adhesive tapes and laminations etc. – are to be planned for the preservation of the integral stock.

As acid substances are produced in the paper in the course of the ageing – which cause the cellulose chains, the paper is composed of, to be split up and shortened –, a general problem is concerned here, at least for the documents stored in Bad Arolsen. This process, which is therefore particularly concerning the paper from the time of the Second World War to a considerable extent, may well be illustrated graphically.

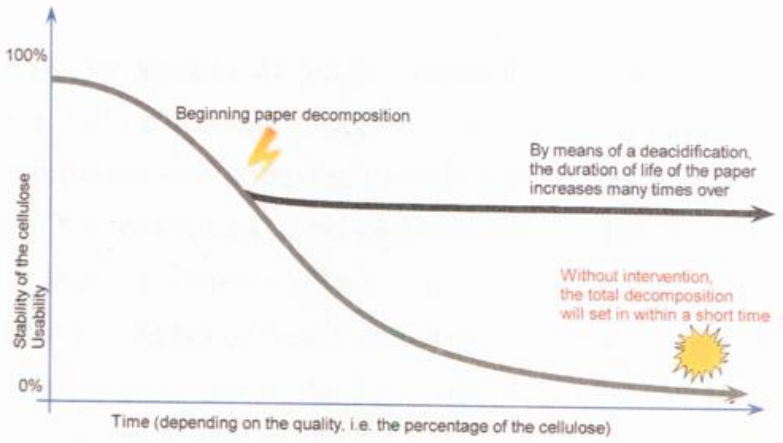

Illustration 14: Autocatalytic exponential paper disintegration

The same is true in respect of the illustration of the other damages ascertained in the stock of documents of the ITS:

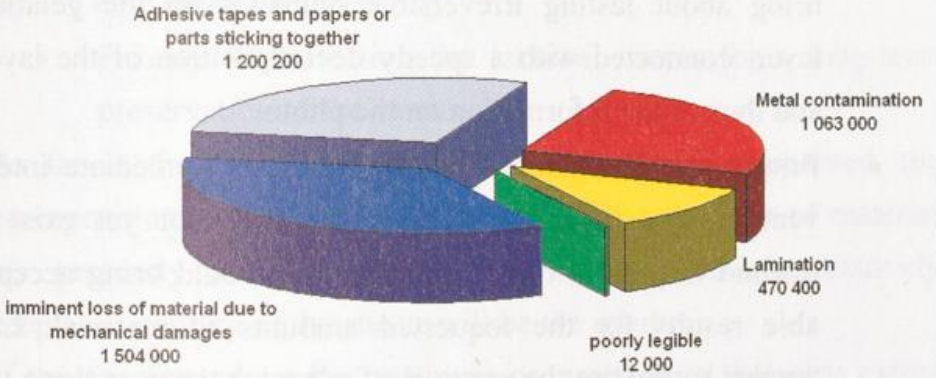

Illustration 15: The significance of the damages found at the ITS

On the basis of the types of damages, a priority list regarding the conservation work to be performed has been elaborated together with a firm in Leipzig. This includes a step-by-step restoration of the stocks over a period of several years. This list clearly reveals that stocks with an active and threatening further loss of material have to be given absolute priority. The serious damages are for the most part of such a nature that is subject to topmost priority, but that cannot be mastered from the point of view of a restoration, neither regarding single sheets nor in large amounts. The little experience gained in this respect by restorers is based on lengthy treatments of single sheets with better or worse results. A method that is inconceivable, if only for financial reasons, for the processing of such large stocks as they are to be found in Bad Arolsen.

The classification of the priorities is as follows:

- Priority 1: Requires immediate action in order to keep the loss of material as small as possible.

Deacidification of all stocks, except for the laminated objects and photo materials. Laminated list material has to be delaminated first, before a further treatment may take place. Photo materials cannot be deacidified, because this would bring about lasting irreversible damages on the gelatine layer, connected with a speedy decomposition of the layer and thus of the information on the photo.

- Priority 1a: Demands, like Priority 1, an immediate intervention. For these damages, there does not yet exist a method in present-day restoration that would bring acceptable results for the requested amounts of material. Examples hereof are the removal of adhesive tapes, making visible the information of poorly legible objects, removal of the lamination (on one and both sides) as well as splitting up these fragile objects after the removal of the lamination.
- Priority 2: Means an intervention in the next 2-3 years in order to prevent a further decomposition and therefore loss of material connected with it.
  The following damages are to be repaired here: Removing the metal contaminations caused by staples and paper clips, closing rips, stabilizing edges, adding missing parts and stabilizing binding damages.
- Priority 3: Long-term, preventive conservation measures on the stock that conclude a restoration reasonably and that are additionally necessary in order to stop the ageing process.
  To this group belongs the replacement of the available storage materials (envelopes, boxes, ring files, loose index boxes made of cardboard or wood) by materials suitable for an archival preservation: Envelopes made of buffered archival paper for list and index material, envelopes made of not buffered archival paper for photographic materials, archival

boxes made of special archival cardboard with a filing mechanism or spring folding device made of a special synthetic material suitable for an archival preservation, archival boxes for indexes as well as archival paper for lining available index cabinets.

- Priority 4: Perfecting the archival rooms for a long-term preservation of the stocks.[18]

As far as the ageing of the objects altogether is concerned, the decomposition of the paper objects as well as the loss of material may presently still be stopped in a stage where a relatively acceptable stability of the sheets will be the result.

If the accelerated ageing continues progressing to the same extent as before without intervention, the stock will soon reach a degree of damaging, which will entail the most serious loss of material and which will render it impossible to create an acceptable conservatory condition. For this reason, the ITS, upon consultation with the ICRC, handed over a second batch of document stocks to the specialists of a firm in Leipzig in the winter of 2001/2002 and received it back in a perfect condition. If the records are supposed to be available for future generations, certain steps do not permit a delay any more. The ITS therefore endeavours to obtain the respective funds, in order to annually refurbish at least the most endangered originals in the near future. Even though the entire information will be stored in the ITS-database after the conclusion of the scanning work, this cannot make a decision about the conservation of the papers obsolete (a fact that is, however, largely called into question for a considerable part by a specialist for restoration in a further expert's report!). If a complete loss of stability is accepted, this means that numerous documents will soon disintegrate completely and may no longer be worked with[19].

The Mandate of Evaluation

As already described, a processing of the inquiries within the scope of the list procedure is performed completely electronically. As a reservation, it is to be remarked that, in case of a necessary additional research in the archival stock, this has to be done manually. At the end of 1999, the scanning work on the more than 30 million individual documents was started at the Tracing Service. Little by little, all the information contained in them may be transferred into the database, in order to make it available to the caseworker for the evaluation.

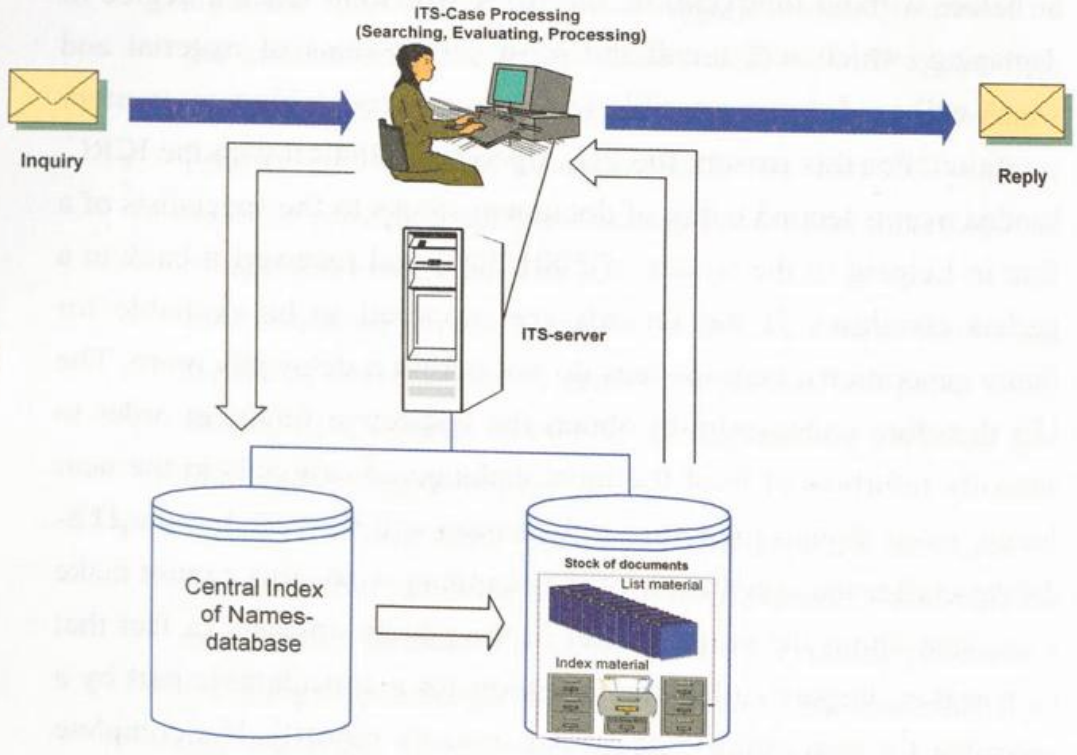

Illustration 16: The fully electronic processing of the inquiries

In contrast to the "classic paper processing" that is still carried out, the future caseworker will be entirely freed from the consultation of the original records, which will additionally mean a protection of the same. While a case that is processed according to mandate is presently still going from section to section – according to the storage place of the relevant documents –, the caseworker will be able in the near future to retrieve all necessary pieces of evidence at his/her computer terminal and to carry out the final processing without having to leave his/her working place. The ITS has set itself the goal to increase the efforts in the scanning work within the scope of the means at disposal as far as possible. Since this electronic registration requires comprehensive preparatory and follow-up work, the project will take up a considerable span of time. Thanks to the amount coped with so far, however, one can assess a period of time that gives rise to the hope that former persecutees who are still alive will be able to benefit from a considerably accelerated processing of their requests.

The Mandate of Historical Research

On the occasion of the annual meeting of the International Commission in Rome in 1995, the supervisory body of the ITS decided on an opening of the documents of a general kind (not personal). This decision was put into practice on 1st January 1996, so that third parties have had access to the stock since then. Particularly in connection with the reappraisal of the own history, many communities and firms have made use of the newly created possibility in the last years.

Three years later, the same commission decided in London on the opening of the other documents for research. A decision that was confirmed in Brussels one year later. Since then, the representatives of the individual governments in the Commission have been endeavouring to determine the conditions for the access.

A substantial facilitation in the choice and determination of the definitive regulation for the opening of the documentation preserved in Bad Arolsen is provided by the numerous new possibilities resulting from the creation of an ITS-database. As the previous expositions clearly reveal, the imaging of the documents of the ITS far beyond the Central Index of Names is in progress in the meantime. The actual stock of documents is usually captured in shades of grey or in colour and filed electronically on magneto-optical data carriers. There, it is under the administration of an archival software that permits an attributing of the individual documents, a comfortable and fast research in the stock of documents as well as an efficient and clear administration of the data carriers. Meanwhile, a little less than 40% of the stock of documents available in Bad Arolsen has already been made accessible electronically.

Together with the physical qualities of the data carriers, the archival software provides for the documents to remain in their determined form and renders a change or deletion impossible.

Out of the electronic archives, the documents may, in principle, be copied at will onto other data carriers and – with certain restrictions (e.g. loss of the colour) – also onto microfilm. Moreover, by such a procedure, it becomes feasible to make the information accessible electronically to third parties on the spot or, if required, also via data networks (e.g. also the Internet).

Individual stocks – as, for example, the documents acquired more recently from social insurance carriers –, however, are definitely not at disposal for a free use outside the humanitarian work. Respective contracts concluded with the individual offices that made the material available provide that these documents may only be used for the evaluation in the interest of the persons concerned. The power of disposal regarding the respective collections remains with the office that gave them to the ITS in these cases. Such documents will be assigned to a special "document class" in the electronic archives, through which a respective restriction of the user-specific access rights is possible.

The other documents almost always contain personal data. In case of a free release of the same, the interests of the still living persons or their descendants, which are worthy of protection, could therefore be affected. For this reason, there exists the stipulation to either withdraw these documents entirely from an access by external parties or to make the indications of names contained in them unrecognizable before the transfer respectively the external access.

While the first variant – an alternative that is not very efficient for interested historians – may be implemented quite easily by means of the already mentioned document classes, the second possibility pre-

supposes a manual preparation of document copies drawn up accordingly. Anyway, all documents will have to be looked through in the run-up to the opening by an employee and the release for the access will have to be initiated explicitly. In the first case, the simple change of the document class will be sufficient for the release respectively the closure. In the second case, the names are to be ascertained, to be marked with the mouse and the respective sections to be cut out respectively blackened. Afterwards, the copy of the document prepared in this way may be filed in an especially released area. An automatic processing of the documents with the aim to blacken individual names is practically impossible, among other things due to the diversity of the records. Besides this, it is to be considered that not only the name makes an unmistakable identification possible, but often also other characteristics.

As a solution for an as fast implementation of a historical research as possible, the ITS is striving for the duplication of all documents preserved at the Tracing Service in the database that is presently being set up. While this database would have to be subdivided according to the needs of an operative tracing service, i.e. as a copy of the "paper order" existing now, a second one, i.e. a duplicate of the same, would have to be completely reorganized according to the needs of a historical archive. Only this way, the humanitarian and the research work could be carried out concurrently and without a mutual impairment. For understandable reasons, the work in both fields does not permit any unnecessary delays.

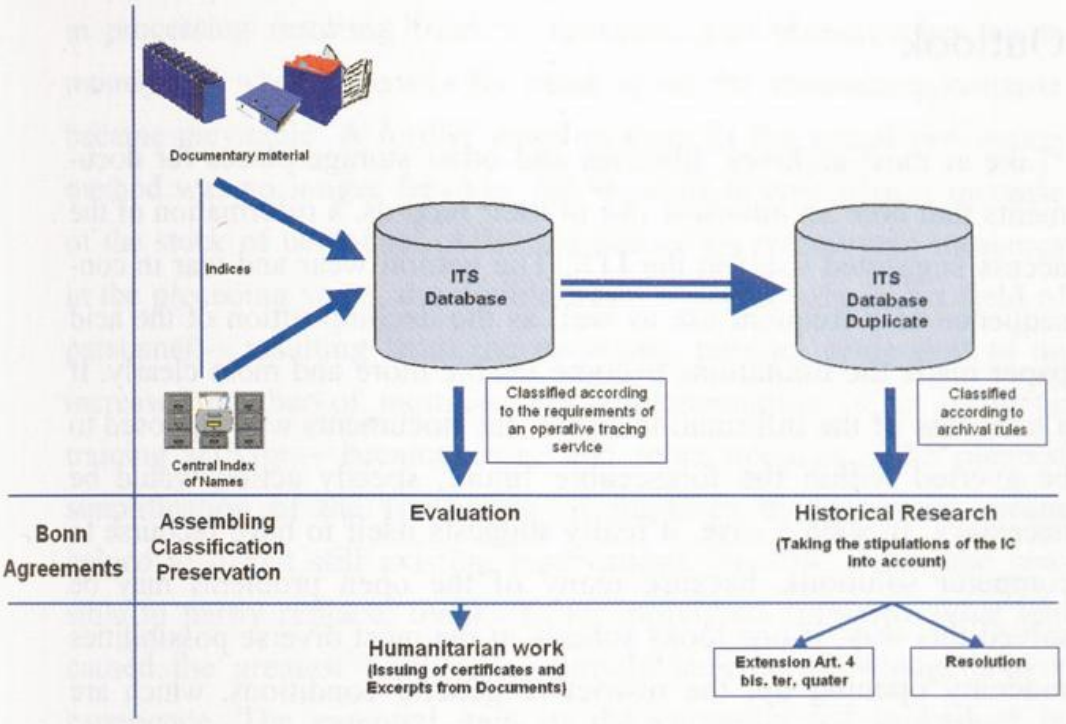

Illustration 17: Evaluation variant of the ITS-database

The International Commission is presently elaborating the guidelines indispensable for this. Basically, all representatives are of the opinion that Article 4 of the Bonn Agreements requires an extension for this purpose. In the form of a resolution, the members are endeavouring to determine all necessary regulations, so that the opening of the archives may be put into practice. This in a special instrument for the ITS that will meet the requirements of all governments.