

# FINAL REPORT

## Radio Free Europe and the Theatre Policy of the Kádár-regime between 1970 and 1982

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Visegrad Scholarship

OSA

14 May – 14 July 2018

The theme I proposed for the OSA Fellowship is part of a wider research in which I investigate the theatre policy of the Kádár-regime in Hungary. In 2017, my colleague, Orsolya Ring and I researched the various Hungarian archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Budapest Főváros Levéltára, Országos Színháztörténeti Intézet és Múzeum, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Színháztörténeti Tára, etc.) for documents about the general theatre policy of the regime between 1970 and 1982, reflected in the carefully planning and controlling of the theatres' repertoires. We found evidences about silencing and/or banning various authors (Örkény, Weöres, Csurka, Nádas etc.) and productions (*The Merchant of Venice*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Marat-Sade*, *Bambini di Prága*, etc.). The book was published by the end of March 2018 by the Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum.

In the proposed research at the OS Archives, I wanted to extend my search and investigate how the socialist authorities' decisions, instructions, withdrawals and bans, referring to various artists and productions, were communicated in Western Europe through the Free Radio Europe/Radio Liberty. At the same time, as the information about the ban of a production or silencing someone was often kept secret even from those the information referred to, I assume, apart from gossips, the Free Radio Europe was the first (in Hungary illegal) source to publicly announce it in Hungary. During my research at the OSA, I investigated the Records of Information Services Department, 1952-1997 (HU OSA 205-4); the Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, 1949-1994 (HU OSA 300-40), especially the Transcript of Broadcast (HU OSA 300-40- 13), and the Records on Index on Censorship (HU OSA 301).

I consulted with the following boxes at the OS Archives:

HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 169  
HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 170  
HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 188  
HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 189  
HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 1972  
HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 1973  
HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 1974  
HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 1975  
HU OSA 300-40-1 Box 1976  
HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 1477

HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 1483  
HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 1490  
HU-OSA 300-40-1 Box 1491  
HU-OSA 335-0-1 Box 3  
HU-OSA 302-3-4 Box 12  
HU OSA 301-0-2 Box 2  
HU OSA 301-0-2 Box 3  
HU OSA 301-0-2 Box 13  
HU OSA 301-0-3 Box 222  
HU OSA 301-0-3 Box 223

Investigating these records, I had two basic questions: what did the members of the Hungarian Unit at RFE know about the Hungarian theatrical situation in general? And how did they get their information? Reading through the Hungarian situation reports, it was clear that the information was based on Hungarian newspapers and magazines. They organised the clippings in files on Hungarian theatre in general and on specific theatres in Budapest and the countryside as well. It was a precise and ordered system.

In their reports, they wrote about the restructuring of the provincial theatre network in 1970; the replacement of some of the leaders of the theatres (i.e. when Gábor Zsámbéki and Gábor Székely came to the National Theatre, and the establishment of the Népszínház by the amalgamation of the 25. Színház and Déryné Színház); and some problematic productions (Tibor Gyurkovics, *Isten nem szerencsejátékos / God is not a Gambler*, 1975, dir. by Imre Kerényi, Madách Kamaraszínház; István Örkény, *Pisti a vérzivatarban / Stevie at the Bloodbath*, dir. by Zoltán Várkonyi, Pesti Színház, 1979; Gyula Hernádi, *Hasfelmetsző Jack / Jack, the Ripper*, dir. by Miklós Jancsó, Várszínház, Népszínház, 1979; István Csurka, *Deficit / Deficit*, dir. by István Horvai, Pesti Színház, 1980).

Though considered as problematic at that time, these productions were already on the public domain. Played only in small studio theatres, they were also pre-selected and pre-censored, and directed by the most reliable, the most trusted theatre directors of the Kádár-regime. Though they were considered as serious issues, now it seems to me that the regime created its own carefully selected and controlled opposition. Analysing these records, it was clear that the members of the Hungarian Unit had precise knowledge on the Kádár-regime's theatre policy and censorship in general and theatre censorship in particular. These records prove that they knew about the strange situation that though there were no censorship office and officially agreed rules, the entire system was under control by the officials at the ministry of culture and the local city councils. They also knew about the special game of double coding, the conservatism of the Hungarian theatre people and audiences, and the role of theatre as a social form. As one of the reports explains in 1980 that 'it voices the sort of social and political commentary which is not permissible elsewhere'.

Though precise in its scope, their knowledge had certain limitations as well. Due to the fact that they received their information from official, already censored Hungarian sources – newspapers and magazines – they knew as much as a Hungarian citizen knew. Or even less as they could not really read between the lines and could not listen to the rumours circulating in Hungary about the bans of people and productions. When they wrote about Pisti / Stevie for instance, they did not mention that it was written in 1969 as a novel, and published twice until its premiere in 1979. Apart from that, it seems to me that they did not know about the struggles of the so-called „amateur” groups (like the so-called Orfeo-case in 1973 for

instance), so they did not know about the theatre issues, which could not get any publicity. This statement is also proved by the fact that it does not turn out from these reports whether they knew about the ban of plays and productions – like the *Merchant of Venice* for instance premiered only once in 1986 – which also did not get any publicity. In general, I can conclude that it is still important to make my research as it proves what was (not) known about Hungarian theatre from the outside of Hungary.

Apart from my initial research, I also collected materials about the following topics:

1. The Radio Theatre of RFE in 1951/1952, consulting with the following boxes:

HU-OSA 300-40-13 Box 1  
HU-OSA 300-40-13 Box 2  
HU-OSA 300-40-13 Box 3  
HU-OSA 300-40-13 Box 4

2. The Staging of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in Sarajevo in 1993, consulting with the following boxes:

HU-OSA 304-0-7 Box 8  
HU-OSA 304-0-7 Box 9  
HU-OSA 304-0-7 Box 10  
HU-OSA 304-0-7 Box 11  
HU-OSA 304-03-3 Box 24  
HU-OSA 304-0-9 Box 1  
HU-OSA 341-0-1 Box 29

3. Taxi-blocked in 1990, consulting with the following boxes:

HU-OSA 205-4-140 Box 135  
HU-OSA 205-4-140 Box 136  
HU-OSA 420-2-1 Box 43

In general, I collected a lot of materials and spent a wonderful and useful time at OS Archive. As a result, I would like to thank you for your generous help and support.

Budapest, 17 July 2018

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