

**“Parting Iron Curtain”: Radio Liberty and Its Policy towards Samizdat during Late Socialism**

**Grantee Report  
(June – July 2012)**

My research project was awarded a grant from the Vysegrad Fund in 2012. Thanks to this grant I was able to study the Open Society Archive’s (OSA) body of administrative documents kept in the Samizdat Archives sub-fonds)<sup>1</sup>. To help in my research I was assigned a research director, András Mink, and special consultant, Olga Zaslavskaya whom I would like to thank for their help and valuable advice.

The research was meticulously carried out and all the time given me for work with the archive was taken advantage of. I am also grateful to the archive staff, who permitted me to continue my work even when the reading room was officially closed.

As a result of intensive study I was able to familiarize myself with the entire fonds. I reviewed all 16 archive boxes (more than 6000 pages) in their entirety. During my work I identified and copied documents reflecting the activity of Radio Liberty relating to Samizdat. In total, more than 1000 digital images were taken.

Although my research focused on the early period of Radio Liberty’s work with Samizdat, the second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s, this restriction applied only to the document search. Documents relating to Samizdat were analyzed regardless of the date of their publication. A look at the later body of documents gave me the possibility to formulate a more clear vision of the body of documents from the early period as a whole, to “immerse” it into a historical context and to see the dynamics of the situation.

As a result, all the main goals of my work at the OSA were achieved. A meticulous reconstruction of the early period of Radio Liberty’s work with Samizdat was completed and a good foundation of sources for the study of Radio Liberty’s Samizdat policy was created. The results of my research were presented in July of 2012 at the OSA. During my presentation I discussed some of my more important discoveries that shed light on the institutional aspect of Radio Liberty’s Samizdat policies<sup>2</sup>. I was able to substantiate the working hypothesis which states that in its early period

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<sup>1</sup> HU OSA 300-85

<sup>2</sup> And illustrated these finds in the form of photos and citations shown during my presentation.

Radio Liberty's work with Samizdat was confined to its Research Department and was realized under the supervision of the Program Policy Division. This is evidenced by memorandums released by both units and by official correspondence.

In 1968 Radio Liberty's Samizdat activity became more focused and quickly grew in intensity. This is demonstrated by the rate with which the collection, which was growing rapidly, was being compiled<sup>3</sup>. In the fall of 1968, Samizdat was being actively incorporated into broadcasts about the USSR. In the same year, the "Samizdat Materials" bulletin, where documents originating in the USSR are published, began to be issued (from 1971 on an almost daily basis). In 1972 another publishing project saw the light: the first three volumes of the "Compilation of Samizdat documents" are released<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the newly obtained documents, were processed, which included retyping, description, entry into the register and several card-indexes.

Nevertheless, the Samizdat Unit did not appear as an independent structure until the second half of the 1970s. In my presentation I offered the listeners several hypotheses explaining the reasons for the "delay" in institutionalization. There is reason to believe that in its early period Samizdat activity held the status of a special project of the two abovementioned units. At a time when Radio Liberty was being financed and controlled by the CIA, this status may have actually been more effective in, for example, attracting resources and negotiating the bureaucratic formalities. I have already mentioned that there is evidence of the extremely high speed with which work was conducted. The fact that this was not a coincidence can be seen from traces of, if not euphoria, than of somewhat exaggerated expectations regarding Samizdat that were prevalent in the documents of the early period. At this point it is important to clarify a point: these expectations did not concern just Samizdat itself but the burst of independent social activity in the USSR from the end of 1967 into the beginning of 1978 as a whole. However, in the Radio Liberty documents Samizdat and these activities are usually treated as one and the same.

With that in mind, it would likely be premature to conclude without additional evidence that the accelerated work pace is due to the exploitation of these hopes. For example, one theme that runs through the analyzed documents is the necessity to not cause harm to the Samizdat authors. The staff of Radio Liberty was aware that the Soviet authorities spared no effort in creating a negative image, to say it mildly, in the public's eye of this source of information that was beyond its control. This knowledge may have lead to the belief that the open or secret creation of a

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<sup>3</sup> By 1969 this collection included little more than 100 documents, while by the end of the 1970s this number grew to 500 and by mid 1973 to 2500 (18 thousand pages).

<sup>4</sup> A total of 30 volumes was published.

structure that would focus exclusively on Samizdat would be counterproductive. However, it has to be admitted that the intent of these remarks may have been referring solely to the minimization of harm. At trials of dissidents in the Soviet Union the broadcasting of texts by Radio Liberty was considered proof of “anti-soviet” activity.

Only further research can prove or disprove the accuracy of these hypotheses. The research I conducted so far has enabled me to delineate the broader and narrow directions this search should take. A comparison of documents from different periods has shown that the administrative documentation of the early phase is more poorly represented at the OSA than that of the second half of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. More precisely, the number of administrative documents from the early period is inferior, in addition, certain types of documents are either sporadically represented or completely absent<sup>5</sup>.

For a representative reconstruction of the early years of Radio Liberty’s work with Samizdat it is necessary to search for the relevant documents among the papers of the Research Department and the Program Policy Division. Extending the research into the “upper echelons” of the radio station management is, of course, of interest. This will allow us to understand the degree to which Radio Liberty’s higher management participated in and influenced Samizdat policy formulation.

As is well known, the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty corporate records are currently stored in the Hoover Institute Archives. I have familiarized myself with the broad description of this fonds<sup>6</sup> and have mentioned in my presentation my hope of continuing its careful and efficient study at the Hoover Institute Archives. During the discussion that took place after my presentation, this idea was supported by the OSA director Istvan Rév. He positively evaluated my presentation and proposed writing a proposal in his name requesting funds to conduct a research study at the Hoover Institute<sup>7</sup>.

This proposal by I. Rév was, of course, gratefully accepted. It agrees perfectly with the direction that this study should take next and, I believe, can be considered as additional proof of the success of the research conducted within the framework of the Visegrad Fund’s grant.

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<sup>5</sup> The absence of financial documentation in particular strikes ones eye. For example, there is no budget records that would include spending and activity related to the processing, archiving or publication of Samizdat.

<sup>6</sup> Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, Inc. A Register of its Corporate Records in The Hoover Institution Archives / Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 2011 // [http://hooverferl.stanford.edu/RFE/findingAids/RFE\\_Register.pdf](http://hooverferl.stanford.edu/RFE/findingAids/RFE_Register.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> In the framework of the agreement between the OSA and the Hoover Institute there is a possibility for the OSA staff of conducting such a search (up to 108 hours, see [http://www.osaarchivum.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2131%3Ahoover-archives-research-assistance-scholarship&catid=35%3Acat-projects&Itemid=2269&lang=en](http://www.osaarchivum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2131%3Ahoover-archives-research-assistance-scholarship&catid=35%3Acat-projects&Itemid=2269&lang=en)).

I would like to thank the Visegrad Fund for the opportunity to complete this research and to express my appreciation to the OSA staff for their help and the exceptionally welcoming and constructive atmosphere.

10.08.2012, Moscow