

Visegrad Scholarship – Final Report
“East-European Exiles in the Cold War Era in Comparison”

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My five-year-long Ph.D. research at Charles University in Prague was focused on several Czechoslovak democratic politicians, who were active in exile in the USA after the Communist coup of February 1948. I learned that “exile politics”, even under the very difficult conditions of the Cold war, was an independent and very original art of politics and that it merits further observation. Indeed, it has more recently become the subject of historical and political research among several other individual researchers.

To begin, the Czech/Czechoslovak exile was not unique. There were other East-European countries, which fell behind the Iron Curtain, where thousands of people had to leave for the West, including the majority of the cultural, scientific, intellectual, and political elites, after the communists seized power. These people undertook the difficult task of liberating their homelands from communist rule. They needed to gain the support of world powers and, most importantly, to establish a unifying umbrella body that would become a worthy partner for Western governments. The USA was considered the exemplar of freedom and democracy, and the only superpower with the potential to defeat the Soviets.

The representatives of these democratic parties, dozens of former ministers, deputies, ambassadors and senior government officials from Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, expelled by communist regimes while abroad, looked to the U.S. government and expected every support in their struggle for the return of democracy to Eastern Europe. They founded their exile “councils” and “committees”, but without overt support from the U.S. government, they had only limited influence. At the same time, the State Department and the CIA intended to use the exile communities for their own political and propaganda agenda. So in June 1949, they founded an organization, intended to unify and integrate all the councils and committees from the exile blocs under one umbrella. This organization was called the Committee for a Free Europe. During the fifties, this committee realized a number of well-known projects, such as Crusade for Freedom, Assembly of Captive European Nations (ACEN, also called the little United Nations), Free Europe University, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and so forth.

Based on archival documents and the memories of eyewitnesses within the exile communities, the organizations covered by the Committee for a Free Europe seem to have been more a tool of propaganda than serious supranational institutions. Their structures, founders, leaders, goals, funding and effect on the activities of exile committees and councils remain among the lesser-known chapters of the Cold War. I have learned how important the role of democracy, in its North American meaning, was to the plans of the East-European émigrés. I came to understand the obvious influence and inspiration of American and Canadian politics, society and culture on the exile community, not only on Czechoslovaks, but also on Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, Latvians and Albanians. Political refugees from all East European nations behind the “Iron Curtain” were allowed to begin new lives, thanks to the generosity and sympathies of their hosts. The exiled politicians, diplomats and journalists could carry on their careers overseas, but they had to follow their host’s instructions and be at the service of the U.S. government and its foreign policy. So, can we consider all the activities and events of the Committee for Free Europe as just a “game” of the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency or did they have actual influence or power to affect the Cold War? To answer this basic question, in-depth research across many academic disciplines such as modern history, international relations, political science, Cold War theory, sociology, anthropology, and migration or ethnic studies would be needed. The variety and necessity of this interdisciplinary approach is exactly what makes the topic so exciting to me.

I have already mentioned Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. It had probably the strongest influence and the widest range of activities of all long-term projects led by the National Committee for Free Europe. Every national radio desk (Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian) broadcast breaking events behind the „Iron Curtain“, news of émigré life, and broader global development. Various analyses and reports prepared by the RFE/RL staff offer a unique view into Cold War history. Thanks to the rich RFE/RL archive available as part of the Open Society Archives collections, I was able to do in-depth research on this topic. I have consulted materials from the following collections:

HU OSA 300-10-2 (Yugoslav Subject Files I) – BOX 1, 150-155

HU OSA 300-10-3 (Yugoslav Subject Files II) - BOX 29, 31, 37, 38

HU OSA 300-20-1 (Bulgarian Subject Files) - BOX 66-69

HU OSA 300-30-30 (Miscellaneous Records of the Czechoslovak Unit) – BOX 21, 25-30

HU OSA 300-30-2 (Czechoslovak Unit - Old Code Subject Files I) – microfilm reels 74-77, 141, 142

HU OSA 300-30-6 (Czechoslovak Unit - Old Code Subject Files V) – BOX 67-75

HU OSA 300-30-8 (Czechoslovak Unit - Old Code Subject Card Files) – BOX 20

HU OSA 300-40-1 (Hungarian Unit - Subject Files) – BOX 255, 258-262

HU OSA 300-40-2 (Hungarian Unit - Subject Files in English) – BOX 22, 23

HU OSA 300-50-1 (Polish Unit - Old Code Subject Files) – BOX 479, 495-502

HU OSA 300-60-1 (Romanian Unit - Subject Files) - BOX 197, 203

In addition, I worked with other OSA collections - Personal Papers of General Béla Király 1956-1996 (HU OSA 336), periodicals in English, Czech and other languages, as well as RFE/RL staff interviews taped on VHS. Also a large number of relevant books, immediately available in OSA or the CEU library, were very helpful. Altogether, I took 1260 pictures with my camera (including 150 microfilm scans). Uploading of selected files into Parallel Archive is still in progress.

My impression of my stay at the OSA Archive is extremely positive. I deeply appreciate the research conditions, the hospitality of the staff, the availability of the materials, and online access to all research aids. I consider OSA one of the best research facilities of its kind. The unique characteristic of my research is its complexity. It is necessary to go through personal archival collections, books, periodicals, minutes of meetings of various organizations, as well as interviews and documentary movies to create an overall picture of the exile phenomenon. All of this is accessible thanks to the rich OSA collections. Moreover, I know this will not be my last visit to the archive. I know I can rely on OSA again in the future when doing research on different topics related to the Cold War and modern history. I have already submitted an article, a report about my productive research experience in Budapest. It will be published in summer 2014 in the review journal *Soudobé dějiny* (Contemporary History) at the Institute of Contemporary History, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. I believe more Czech researchers will follow my path to OSA soon.

Finally, let me express my thanks to the Open Society Archive and the International Visegrad Fund for their generous support, which allowed me the opportunity to carry on my research in Budapest. My personal thanks go to Mrs. Katalin Gáboros for administrative support, to my supervisor Mr. András Mink for consultations, and to Mr. Robert Parnica and Mr. Örs Lehel Tari for their kind assistance in the reading room. I am looking forward to my next association with OSA.