

Dr Joanna Walewska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Ludwik and Aleksander Birkenmajer Institute for the History of Science, Polish Academy of Science in Warsaw

joanna.walewska@gazeta.pl

“Wired Radio Spreads Octopus Tentacles”¹.

Development of wired radio in Poland and other countries from the Soviet Block in the eyes of Radio Free Europe

Report from research in OSA Archive, 23 January–10 February 2017

My research proposal for OSA was conceived as a part of a larger project entitled: *Radio on the leash: radio-engineering industry, institutions, and listeners' practices in People's Republic of Poland*, which is aimed at creating a narrative on the cultural and social aspects of the history of radio in Poland after the World War II. The research was dedicated to the study of documents pertaining to development of wired radio systems in Poland and other countries from the Soviet Block. During my research at OSA, I went through the files of Monitoring of Polish Radio by Radio Free Europe, which I would like to use as a background for studying propaganda in the next stage of development of my project.

Materials in OSA Archive

The OSA catalogue contains 97 digitalised and 30 microfilmed documents tagged „wired radio”. Most of them are field reports made for RFE (Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute), two archival boxes (#1060/No. 4 and No. 5; HU OSA 300-50-1 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Polish Unit: Old Code Subject Files) on Polskie Radio (Polish Radio), as well as documents related to the propaganda on industry, development of telephone network, relation from the Kasprzak Radio Plants in Warsaw and many others, which should provide interesting background for my project. I would like to stress that I was able to access most of these materials before I came to Budapest, because they are part of the collection “Information Items” which is fully digitised. This allowed me to

¹ *Wired Radio Spreads Octopus Tentacles over Gliwice*, 27 Oct, 1954, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute (RFE/RL Research Institute), [electronic record] <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:8bf094a2-3ddd-4806-b44c-e17ab790ddd6>, [accessed: 13 Nov, 2016].

save time for further exploration of the collection, which lead me to detailed study of Monitoring of Polish Radio files.

HU OSA 300-50-16, Monitoring of the Polish Radio and Television (1952-1957) consists of approx. 70 boxes. The monitoring was made by RFE on a daily basis and it contains the typescript of Polish Radio broadcast from given day. The typescript of broadcasting was made as a part of bulletins and it includes: record of the most important information made by editors of the bulletin, transcripts of information and entertainment programmes, handwritten comments from readers of the bulletins, information about schedule, and sometimes also additional data about technical breaks in Polish Radio's broadcast and about the reasons of interferences.

During my research in OSA I was able to access 18 boxes and I have made approx. 15,000 digital photos. During the next few months I would like to continue my research in Budapest in order to access the remaining files from the Monitoring of Polish Radio collection, as well as additional materials concerning the case of Józef Światło.

Further research objectives

The goal is to cross-reference documents from OSA with materials I have accessed in Polish archives, mainly in the Radio-Engineering Industry Union (UNITRA) collection in the State Archive in Wrocław, branch in Kamieniec Żabkowicki, and Archive of Polish Radio (files on Polish Radio preserved in the Centre for Documentation and Programme Collections of Polish Television and Archive of Polish Radio S.A.). As I expected, the materials preserved in the Open Society Archive complemented the documents from the collections mentioned above and shed new light on the history of radio in Poland and East-Central Europe.

Preliminary findings

1. Case study no 1: wired radio

Although between 1945 and 1966 Polish wired radio system was one of the most developed in Europe and made radio broadcasts available to hundreds of thousands of people, this subject is largely understudied in Polish historiography. The main historical narrative on the cultural and propaganda significance of radio during the Stalinist era focuses on mainly on "heroic" aspects of its development like illegal listening of foreign broadcasting stations and obstruction of signal of Radio Free Europe or Voice of America by the Communist authorities. While I consider all these aspects as very important subject matter, my goal is to carry out research on

everyday practices related to material/technological base available in these countries. After a preliminary research in the archival collections of Polish Radio I put forward three main hypotheses, that I was able to develop and examine further in the light of materials available at OSA. As a point of reference I have used stereotypical narrations on wired radio in Poland.

1. Wired radio network in Poland as a Soviet heritage

Wired radio was developed on mass scale starting from March/April 1945, after the installation of Polish Radio's crew in Warsaw on Koszykowa and later on Targowa streets. During the discussions concerning further development of radio in Poland, Wilhelm Billig (who spent the WWII period in Soviet Union) and other engineers developed an idea of wired radio as a solution to drastic shortage of radio-engineering equipment (including radio sets). During the WWII, a majority of the radio equipment (broadcasting and receiving) was destroyed and only few plants located in central Poland survived (e.g., Walewski Factory in Cracow, IKA Factory in Łódź and Loudspeakers Manufacturing Company in Września). These plants, along with several textile factories in Lower Silesia, which were transformed by the Germans into radio systems factories (Telefunken and Hagenuk-Werke Kiel) served as a basis for the revival of radio industry in the postwar Poland. Most of the engineers envisioned revival of Polish radio industry as a long-lasting process, that would consist of several stages: (1) establishing of wired-radio system consisting of amplifiers, loudspeakers (from plants in Września, Łódź and Lower Silesia) and remaining radio sets, which should be repaired; (2) establishing of production of radio sets based on the licence agreements with Swedish company Aga-Baltic as the ultimate goal was to produce the best radio receivers possible and at the same time to make them affordable in order to enable people to listen not only to Polish but also to foreign radio stations; (3) rebuilding of damaged radio stations to cover the whole area of Poland with radio signal (especially in the so called "Recovered Territories"); and (4) creation of provisional wired radio network and construction of cheap, popular radio receiver (there was also an attempt to implement a production of Detefon, a crystal detector popular before WWII, because many rural areas were not yet electrified

2. Wired radio as one-way communication system.

Although wired-radio system was intensively developed especially during the period preceding the national referendum of 1947 and creation of Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in 1948, and thus is now mainly perceived as a channel for government propaganda, there were many subversive or even sabotage practices related to it (broadcasting of "listeners' choice concerts", use of radio as a telephone, broadcasting of foreign stations or local news instead of PR

programme, and many others). Inclusion of these practices makes the image of post-war wired-radio more complex.

3. Opposition of RFE, Voice of America, Radio Madrid as free, independent and open to the world and wired radio as coarse, fasting, centralized, distorting the view of the world. Such a sharp juxtaposition is very popular in oral history narrations about the history of Polish Radio, but also in memoirs of people who collaborated with RFE (see, e.g., Marek Nowakowski's "Radio Free Europe in Memoirs" in the *Notes from Modernity* series of radio broadcasts). In the next step of my project, I would like to have a closer look at the material (technical) basis for development of radio system in Poland and other countries, as it seems that for instance such radio sets as "Aga" (one of the state-of-the-art receivers in 1940s and 1950s) were also used in the "radio-knots" (*radiowęzły*) and thus became a source of the above-mentioned subversive practices.

Materials from OSA show that people working at RFE were afraid that the further development of wired radio system in the Soviet Bloc would result in complete prohibition of lamp radio sets, but documents available in the archive of Polish Radio indicate that Billig and engineers working in the Technical Department of PR never envisioned such a plan.

Documents preserved in OSA have a great importance for my research as informants working for RFE used to describe thoroughly practices related to and public sentiment towards the wired radio in Poland and other countries from the Soviet Block. I hope that by studying the RFE documents I gathered during my stay in Budapest I will be able to overcome the "heroic" narrative about Polish Radio and its audience by creating a more complex image, based not only on the general political narrative but also on closer analysis of documented everyday practices and their social and cultural context.

2. Case study no 2: propaganda and Cold War

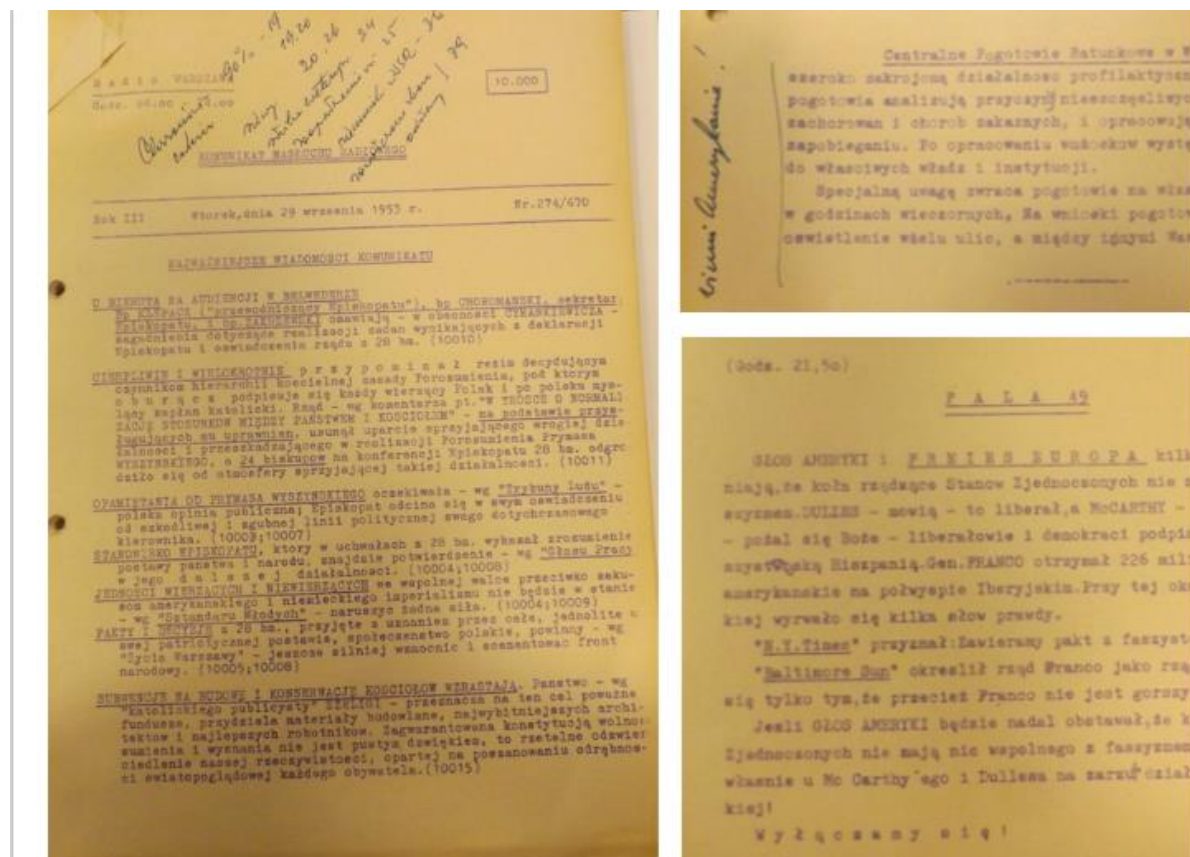
Monitoring files are the tangible evidence that despite the Cold War divide, both Polish Radio and RFE were listening to each other through the Iron Curtain. In my opinion, those files allow researchers to position Polish Radio's propaganda strategies and in the Cold War context and show this institution as a player, whose policy was shaped both by Western broadcasting stations supported by U.S. government as well as by the USRR.

First of all, they are a visible proof of RFE's and VOA's propaganda effectiveness, because Polish Radio's strategy of fighting enemy propaganda consisted mainly on discussing the opponents' arguments on air. Therefore, every time Western broadcasting stations were

mentioned, it was an indirect evidence that Polish authorities, were closely monitoring their broadcast and felt obliged to respond. The corpus of Monitoring files allows researcher to ask questions about frequency and a position of the particular information in the radio stream:

- How many times and how often VOA, BBC or RFE were mentioned on air?
- Was it in a prime time?
- Was it during popular programmes like „Muzyka i aktualności” or „Fala 49”?
- In which context they were mentioned?

The analysis of those document may serve as a background for studying the development of the language of propaganda against Western broadcasting stations, and its changes in time according to the current political developments both inside country and abroad. They provide also an insight into RFE’s way of prioritisation of information and its critical assessment, because almost all bulletins contain a clear hierarchy of news and additional annotations left by their readers.



First page of the bulletin from September 29, 1953 shows digest of the most important events and news from Poland from the point of view of Radio Free Europe. The bulletin contains readers’ marginalia, which consist of critical or sarcastic comments. To the right is a typescript of “Fala 49” programme, the most iconic propaganda

programme during Stalinism era. The document contains comments about Voice of America and RFE, which is referred to as FREIES EUROPA since Polish Radio wanted to suggest listeners that RFE was a “Fascist radio” and their editors did not support the Peoples’ Republic of Poland policy towards the Western borders based on the Odra and Nysa rivers.

During my stay in OSA I was trying to explore the possibilities to approach these documents by preliminary analysis of one of many threads, namely the case of the murder of Stefan Martyka, who was a speaker of Polish Radio. Martyka was killed in his apartment in 1950 by members of illegal military organisation, because as a speaker in “Fala 49” he became a symbol of radio propaganda of that time. I decided to cross-reference monitoring of Polish Radio from the period between August 1953, when listeners were first notified about upcoming trial, and September 1953, when radio broadcasted report from the three-day trial, along with commentaries and interviews with people who knew Martyka. I decided to juxtapose this information along with letters sent to Polish Radio from the period between his murder and trials on the timeline, which allowed me to reflect on the structural and temporal connections between particular Polish Radio programmes and the reaction of listeners to this political murder and its circumstances. As a result of this analysis, I was able to establish that Polish Radio used Martyka’s case to make a connection between his killing and the influence of enemy propaganda of Voice of America on his perpetrators. I would like to apply the same method to the analysis of other important case studies like RFE and its attitude toward western territories, Polish Radio’s battle against Vatican and Catholic Church in Poland, Józef Światło’s revelations and others. I have no doubt that these files have a very unique status because of the scope of analysis they allow to conduct. Until now, most of the radio historians based their research only on the audio files and selected transcript of programmes, which were preserved in the archives of Polish Radio.

* * *

I am very grateful for the opportunity of working in the OSA archive and I would like to continue my research in this extremely rich collection. I hope I will be able to upload at least some of the files I was able to copy during my stay to the parallel archive, as I believe they may be of some interests to other researchers working on such subjects as radio, propaganda or Polish postwar history.

List of accessed materials

Monitoring of Polish Radio:

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 1

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 2

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 3

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 4

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 5

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 6

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 7

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 8

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 9

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 10

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 11

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 12

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 13

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 14

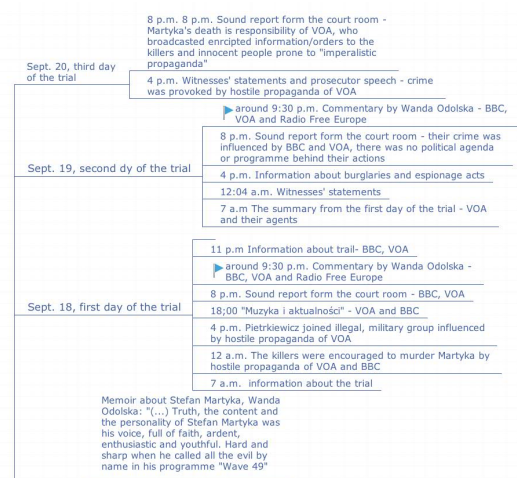
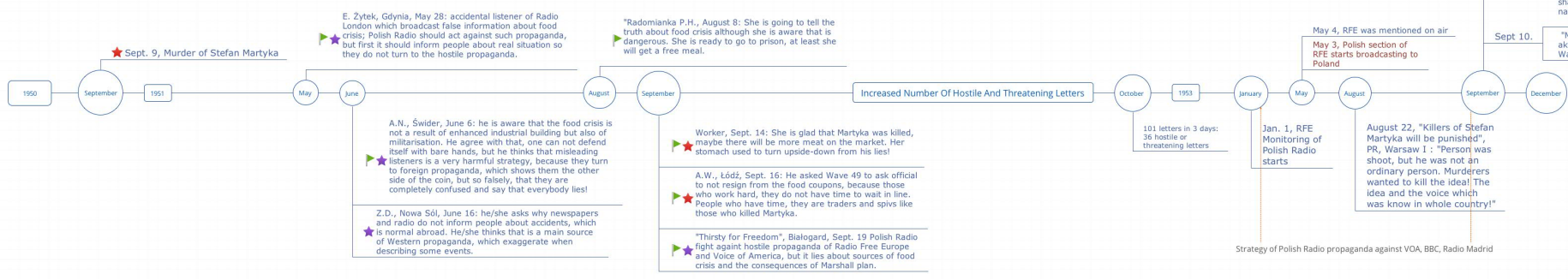
HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 15

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 16

HU OSA 300-50-16, box. 17

Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information

Items: HU OSA 300-1-2



8 p.m. 8 p.m. Sound report form the court room - Martyka's death is responsibility of VOA, who broadcasted encrypted information/orders to the killers and innocent people prone to "imperialistic propaganda"

4 p.m. Witnesses' statements and prosecutor speech - crime was provoked by hostile propaganda of VOA

around 9:30 p.m. Commentary by Wanda Odolska - BBC, VOA and Radio Free Europe

8 p.m. Sound report form the court room - their crime was influenced by BBC and VOA, there was no political agenda or programme behind their actions

4 p.m. Information about burglaries and espionage acts

12:04 a.m. Witnesses' statements

7 a.m The summary from the first day of the trial - VOA and their agents

11 p.m Information about trial- BBC, VOA

around 9:30 p.m. Commentary by Wanda Odolska - BBC, VOA and Radio Free Europe

8 p.m. Sound report form the court room - BBC, VOA

18:00 "Muzyka i aktualności" - VOA and BBC

4 p.m. Pietkiewicz joined illegal, military group influenced by hostile propaganda of VOA

12 a.m. The killers were encouraged to murder Martyka by hostile propaganda of VOA and BBC

7 a.m. information about the trial

Memoir about Stefan Martyka, Wanda Odolska: "(...) Truth, the content and the personality of Stefan Martyka was his voice, full of faith, ardent, enthusiastic and youthful. Hard and sharp when he called all the evil by name in his programme "Wave 49"