

**FINAL REPORT FOR THE VISEGRAD SCHOLARSHIP  
AT THE VERA & DONALD BLINKEN OPEN SOCIETY ARCHIVES**

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The research I conducted at the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society Archives was designed to help me in creating feasible scheme for the complex comparative research on Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Polish efforts to reform the system from within in the posttotalitarian period of communism. I expected to gather archival materials of varied nature which could allow me for the development of my ideas into a complex research plan, aiming for the reconstruction of the ideas of political, social and economic reform of socialism and the way they were put into practice. In order to achieve my goals, I immersed myself into the archives of various units of Radio Free Europe and the Collection on the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research.

Since I am still at an early stage of my research, my intention was rather to cover as many different fields as possible, than to dig deeper into particular problems. One of my initial ideas was to describe the collective portrait of the communist reformers. Looking for their motivations, inspirations and limitations I wanted to find decisive factors which were responsible for only a partial success of any reforms of Soviet-type communism in Eastern Europe. In order to reach that goal I consulted extensively Polish, Hungarian and Czechoslovak biographic files, which turned out to be extremely reach, giving not only a detailed view on the main actors, but also showing the whole historical process from the perspective of important policy makers and their advisors. I decided to concentrate on the reforms of 1960s and 1980s, since it was a time when the systemic reforms were to certain extent ‘fashionable’, and that is why I tended to choose politicians active in that moments (Dubček, Šik, Grósz, Nyers, Rakowski, Jaszczuk etc.).

I must admit, that having consulted a significant number of files, I uphold the initial idea, yet the materials of RFE proved to be useful rather for the comparative analysis of reform discourses but not for the reconstruction of the reformers’ inspirations. Since it is blatantly

impossible to separate sincere political ideas from temporary tactics, the meta-level of analysis including perception and creation of the reform leaders' agenda, seems to be more promising. It does not mean, however, that I am planning to completely abandon the problem of the inspirations for the planned reforms. Such an analysis has to be based rather on the critical reading of ego documents, whereas RFE materials (e.g. background reports) could only be of a secondary importance, due to their relative superficiality and disputable objectivity.

What was from the very beginning among the most important questions for me, was to what extent we are able to show common elements in the policies of reforms in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, not only in the field of economy, but also more generally, including changes in attitude towards the West, western values, popular culture etc. Analyzing materials from 1960s, 1970s and 1980s I came to conclusion that it is never-fully-constructed model of the reformed communism (or communisms, since certain pluralism was finally officially allowed) of late 1980s that is potentially the most interesting as it comes to comparative perspective. The struggle for reform and, at the same time, for a stable ground for communist regimes (especially in Poland and in Hungary) may be analyzed not only from the perspective of policy makers but also from the perspective of the social perception of reforms (thanks to the Collection on the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research). Such a perspective is not only feasible, but even more promising because comparative research on social attitudes to the reforms has not been conducted so far. There are many inspiring suggestions to be found in the *Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont's* collection, among which relative popularity of Hungarian communist politicians in late 1980s (yet not necessarily their policies), was among the most interesting. That seems to challenge, at least to certain extent, dominant discourse of the absolute bankruptcy of the communist system and inevitability of its fall.

During my presentation at the OSA a meaningful point was made by Professor István Rév, for which I am truly grateful, that the very place of reform within the communist system has to be seen in close connection to the always present ghost of counter-reforms. This observations led me to the conclusion, that theoretical frame of what was perceived as 'reform' was involved in complicated interplay between the ideological dogma and the challenges of every-day governance as well as more general economic and social trends. I would like to emphasize this aspect especially, because it was one of the points in which my initial idea for the research was subjected to modification. I had wanted to focus rather on actual policies and specific solutions undertaken by the reformers, but having consulted archival materials at the OSA, I decided to shift my interest towards more subjective perspective in order to make my argument clearer. It

was no less important, that the biographical files of RFE and reports of Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research, encourage to take such perspective. Thanks to them I am able to analyze not only the fear of the reform's inversion but also the awareness of ever-present possibility of hardline coup against policies seen as too 'liberal'.

Thanks to the material that I have consulted, I am now able to analyze, at least to some extent, the imagined visions of possible reforms, as seen by the communists and other participants of the discussions in official press (what is still lacking, and I consider it a gap to be filled, is the samizdat debate on systemic reforms). It was, again, especially interesting as it comes to the last years of communism. It is clear that in Hungary and in Poland a substantial 'change' was very much expected, and in the course of events, even Czechoslovak press published more extensively on the visions of future. Nevertheless, one could have hardly drawn any clear conclusions about the desired shape of the post-reform reality. It contained elements that were clearly mutually contradictory to each other, but that to a large extent mirrored people's hopes and expectations.

Finally, I tried to find the links between reformers from the three countries that were in the center of my interest. Focusing on the late communist period, I was especially interested whether we should perceive communist bloc as a relatively united entity aware of common interests, or rather as a group of countries involved in growing political and economic rivalry. The materials about mutual contacts of Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Polish communists generally seem to confirm the latter. Even such friendly meetings as the one of Miklós Németh and Mieczysław Rakowski in May 1989 in Warsaw, was marked with surprising lack of interest in any sort of cooperation. Question that arises at this point is when exactly communists from Central European countries lost interest in the exchange of cautious reformatory experiences (which was definitely ongoing in the early 1980s). It is not only a matter of political history, in the perspective of which the emergence of *perestroika* constitutes an overwhelmingly important factor. It is also a part of the history of mentality. When, and why, the point has been reached, from which Budapest was no longer an inspiring example to follow in Warsaw? The materials I read at the OSA give a plenty of suggestions, but no clear answer for that question.

I truly believe that the materials I have consulted at the Open Society Archives thanks to the help of the Visegrad Scholarship are of crucial importance to my research. I would like to stress, that good many of the materials would be hardly accessible if it was not for the opportunity created by International Visegrad Fund. The holdings of Radio Free Europe proved to be unique as a basis for comparative approach. I have had opportunity to research on the topic

that was of a vital importance to all the units of RFE which allowed for analyzing one problem from many points of view. Since I plan to continue my research, developing it into a full-fledged analysis of Central European communist countries' way of dealing with the challenge of modernity, I have the intention of returning to the OSA at a later time. I shall do so not only because of the historical richness of the archive, but also due to the professionalism and wonderful atmosphere of this place. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the staff of the OSA for its kindness and professionalism.

#### **DETAILED LIST OF OSA DOCUMENTS CONSULTED**

##### **HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute**

###### **HU OSA 300-30-19 Czechoslovak Unit Biographical Files I**

Box 1-2, 17-24, 59-60, 69-73, 101-103, 107-108, 117, 199

###### **HU OSA 300-40-1 Hungarian Unit Subject Files**

Box 124-125 – Belpolitika: Politikai reform

Box 131 – Belpolitika: Politikai reform

Box 371-372 – Gazdaság: Gazdasági reform

Box 729 – Külkereskedelem: Lengyelország

Box 915-919 – Külpolitika: Külkapcsolatok: Lengyelország

Box 1351-1352 – Párt: Külkapcsolatok: Lengyelország

###### **HU OSA 300-40-5 Hungarian Unit Biographical Files**

Box 1-2, 15-16, 38, 46-47, 54-57, 67, 80-87, 90, 100, 141-146, 155-158, 197

###### **HU OSA 300-50-1 Polish Unit Subject Files**

Box 576 – Polityka zagraniczna: Węgry

###### **HU OSA 300-50-15 Polish Unit Biographical Files**

Box 1, 2, 4-6, 9-16, 18-20, 22-24, 27-38, 43-46

###### **HU OSA 300-60-1 Romanian Unit Subject Files**

Box 156 - Economic Reform in Comecon

**HU OSA 300-85-13 Samizdat Archives Biographical Files**

Box 243

**HU OSA 300-120-13 Subject Files Relating to Eastern Europe**

Box 88, 89 – Poland, Economy, Reform

**HU OSA 420 Collection on the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research**

**HU OSA 420-2-2 Confidential Report and Publications**

Box 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26,  
27, 28

**HU OSA 420-2-3 Open Publications**

Box 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47