Radio Free Europe in Hungary
After 1956 and in the Sixties

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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 4
2. Research Methodology ............................................................................................................................ 6
3. Freedom Radios as Cold War Institutions ............................................................................................ 8
   3.1 The Containment Policy ..................................................................................................................... 8
   3.2 The Establishment of the Freedom Radios .......................................................................................... 9
   3.3 The Mission of Radio Free Europe ..................................................................................................... 10
   3.4 The Foundation of the National Departments .................................................................................... 10
4. The Hungarian Department in the Early Years ....................................................................................... 12
   4.1 The Voice of Free Hungary .............................................................................................................. 12
   4.2 The 1956 Debacle ............................................................................................................................. 14
5. The Impact of RFE ................................................................................................................................. 16
   5.1 Jamming .............................................................................................................................................. 18
   5.2 The Audience Analysis Section ........................................................................................................ 18
   5.3 Interviews ......................................................................................................................................... 20
6. RFE in Hungary after 1956 ..................................................................................................................... 22
   6.1 The Radio Free Europe Syndrome .................................................................................................... 22
   6.2 Responsibility of the Hungarians ........................................................................................................ 22
   6.3 Changes and Rebuilding Credibility ................................................................................................... 25
   6.4 Europeanization and New Principles .................................................................................................. 32
   6.5 Counteractions During the Late Fifties ............................................................................................... 35
7. RFE in Hungary During the Early Sixties ................................................................................................. 37
   7.1 The Peaceful Engagement and Prudency ............................................................................................ 39
   7.2 New Challenges .................................................................................................................................. 41
   7.3 Successful International Coverages .................................................................................................... 42
   7.4 Listening Patterns and Effectiveness .................................................................................................. 44
   7.5 Counteractions in the Early Sixties: Protest and Reprisal ................................................................. 46
   7.6 Audience Research in 1963 ................................................................................................................ 47
8. The Extraordinary Role of Géza Ekecs

8.1 Letters Sent to Teenager Party

The Mid-Sixties

8.2 Listening Patterns Prior and After the Cessation of Jamming
8.3 Erosion of the Communist Unity?
8.4 Counteractions: “I was kicked out of RFE”

9. RFE in Hungary During the Late Sixties

9.1 Personal Risk of Listening to RFE
9.2 The Prague Spring

10. Parallelisms on the Two Sides

10.1 The Relationship with Intelligence
10.2 Monitoring
10.3 A Dialogue between Strategists?

11. Conclusion

13. Appendix

13.1 Directors of the Hungarian Department
13.2 The Freedom Bell
13.3 Pictures from the Book “Cold War Radio”
13.4 Pictures and Subtitles from the Book „Aggressive Broadcasting”
13.5 RFE/RL Today
1. Introduction

The subject of my thesis is Radio Free Europe after 1956 and in the sixties. I chose this period because it is my conviction that it is unjustly neglected after 1956, despite it playing a key role in shaping what the people of Hungary thought of the world and of the West, having been the only source of information not under the regulation and censorship of the powers that be. Seeing as how print and radio news sources dominated the sixties, with television yet to break ground, the effects of RFE can be studied with ease.

I would like to attempt to investigate the role of the Radio during this period - how the structure and programming, guidelines and political principles of the radio changed, what sort of experiences and lessons the events of 1956 brought forth, and what effects it had on the years to come. I think it is important to mention issues such as that after the revolt of 1956 RFE became a bridge between the defectors and their families.

Many important social changes happened in the sixties, first in the Western world, then later (despite all efforts from local authorities); the changes crept in under the Iron Curtain. Many people think that beat music ushered in a new era. Even though the lyrics were not understood by the masses the ambience made it through, and it spoke not only to the teenagers, but also to the adults at the time. And this new wave of values appeared not just in music, or in other forms of art, but also the way young people interacted, and socialized, the strict, rigid traditional social rules changed, and along came Woodstock, the student demonstrations, clothing styles and fashion changed, along with a whole new era.

It is indisputable that this process was sped up with the help of RFE, and a person named László Cseke (real name Géza Ekecs) played a key role in this with his radio show Teenager Party, that has since been deemed of historical significance. The younger class was incredibly thirsty for this new style, and despite the oppression, through the huge volume of letters Cseke could have an interactive relationship with the youth of Hungary. The letters first and foremost requested songs, but they mirrored the frame of mind of the youth and thus became documents, which encapsulated the ambience of the time. Géza Ekecs was one of the most characteristic participants of RFE and could stay popular for 42 years - his life story followed that of the radio.

One of the most important questions is did the radio have the desired political effect as per the agenda of the Americans who were financing it as a strategic weapon in the Cold War. Did this
unique and special effort have any lasting consequences, how did the radio contribute to the change of how Hungarians view the world? In my thesis during the introduction I will discuss the story of the radio, from the formation and start as well, and it's crucial and important role in the events of 1956, but the emphasis will remain on the years that followed, in terms of its defined goals in a very important period, which indicate that RFE was in fact a part of a political arsenal in the hands of the Americans.
2. Research Methodology

In order to make the study as comprehensive as possible and gaining an extensive view the information was collected from multiple sources. Since there are numerous articles, books, studies, surveys, researches and thousands of interviews available about Radio Free Europe, the data was collected from secondary sources. Although the examined territory and period of the thesis (which is Hungary after 1956 and during the sixties) is a relatively rarely discussed area of the history of RFE, therefore the number of books containing sufficient information about the topic in question was more limited. For this reason, this study primarily relies on the books of Hungarian ex-RFE workers who had personal memories and described the life and main events of the Hungarian Department in details. Gyula Borbándi, Csaba Skultéty and Géza Ekecs were all employees of the Hungarian Department for several decades and therefore fundamental and determining personalities of the Radio and its broadcasts.

Besides, essential sources of this study were the surveys conducted by Radio Free Europe itself (now these documents are available in the Open Society Archives). From 1957, the Audience Research Department of RFE had been conducting Gallup-type opinion polls with nationals from their target countries. Only until 1964 more than 19000 people were interviewed, which indicates that thousands of interviews were made every year. The greatest majority of the respondents were initially emigrants, refugees and repatriates (referred simply as ‘refugees’ in the researches) but their interviews raised a number of problems, therefore later on the interviewers were trying to include primarily people who were staying only temporarily in the West; like travelers or people who were visiting their family members; students with Western scholarships; artists, scientists on study trips, athletes, entertainers, transport workers, members of delegations and so on, basically anybody who was available besides the refugees. Of course during the researches a special type of sample collecting method was applied in order to make the survey as representative as possible. The content of these researches are immensely important in the examination of the story of RFE regarding its audience, effectiveness and impact on the target countries, which is one of the core research areas of this study. As it will be revealed later on, unfortunately these researchers could not be completely accurate and suffered from various problems which will be discussed in detail in this thesis. Still the information provided by these researches is indicating essential features of the Radio.
The hypotheses of this study will be also examined through the collected studies and researches. The hypotheses are the followings:

1. The Hungarian Department of RFE could successfully return after the 56 debacle
2. The broadcasts had widespread audience from all social groups
3. The Hungarian program had a determining impact on the whole society, even on the youth
4. Despite the various counteractions of the regime RFE still remained successful
5. RFE could fulfill its original mission and contributed to the disintegration of the Communist Bloc
3. Freedom Radios as Cold War Institutions

3.1 The Containment Policy

International politics was heavily influenced by the Soviet expansion aspirations after the Second World War. The Soviet Union gained control over the countries that were conquered during the war and those who were forced to enter into alliance with them and started to transform their inner state systems according to the Soviet model. However, the United States did not want to accept this and in order to stop the Soviet expansion the Western countries started the “containment” politics with the leadership of the United States. (Borbárdi, 1996, p. 15) This policy was a response to several actions of the Soviet Union to enlarge their influence not only in Eastern Europe but also in China, Korea and Vietnam.

The primary objectives of American foreign policy were the stoppage of the spread of communist ideologies and the alleviation of socialism as a social system, and turn their citizens against the system. (Simándi, 2005, p. 12) The freedom radios, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty (abbreviated as RFE and RL from this point) were originally the idea of the most prominent early Cold War strategy thinkers, especially those who believed that the Cold War would be fought by political rather than military means. The most important figure was George F. Kennan, the father of the containment doctrine. Kennan and the early RFE leadership Allen W. Dulles, Frank Wisner and DeWitt C. Poole all played important roles in shaping policy toward the Soviet Union. (Puddington, 2000, pp. 7-8) Kennan’s primary goal was to prevent the spread of Soviet empire since as long as they had to worry about their own people they could not focus on other territories like Western Europe. (Puddington, 2000, p. 15)

General Eisenhower was probably the most prominent figure of this concept as he said: “The United States must intensify the will for freedom in the satellite countries … These countries are in the soviet back yard, and only as their people are reminded that the outside world has not forgotten them… do they remain potential deterrents to Soviet aggression. It serves our national interest and the cause of peace.” (Puddington, 2000, p. 15) Another declaration of the objectives was by DeWitt Poole: “to comfort and encourage those now in bondage; to reassure them constantly of the West’s steadfast concern for their plight; to keep alive and fortify among them the Western
tradition of freedom and democracy; to hold up a prospect of a better future.” (Puddington, 2000, p. 18)

3.2 The Establishment of the Freedom Radios

Long before the RFR and RL, it was already a traditional technique of governments to sponsor radios in order to promote their geopolitical objectives using the convincing power of propaganda. For example, Hitler used radio to “terrorize neighboring countries”, the Soviet Union also maintained a vast global broadcasting network to promote their ideologies and the USA founded the Voice of America (VOA) to broadcast their ideas about culture and democracy and familiarize the audience with the American political system and American culture. The freedom radios were very different from the traditional ones since their goal was not only informing the audience but they were actually Cold War institutions trying to undermine Soviet propaganda and place doubt in the people’s mind. Their ultimate goal was the peaceful demise of the Communist system and the liberation of satellite nations. (Puddington, 2000, p. ix)

RFE and RL were founded separately: the organization created to oversee the broadcast service of RFE was founded on March 17, 1949 in New York and was called The National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE). It was an American anti-communist organization, which worked for the spreading of American influence in Europe. (Puddington, 2000, p. 5) The Radio Liberty (originally called Radio Liberation) was founded in 1951 by the American Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (Amcomlib) and was broadcasting to the Soviet Union while RFE was broadcasting to Eastern Europe. Both of them were to serve “outlets for exiles broadcasting back to their captive homelands”. (Wasburn, 1992, p. 26) These two radios were basically similar in all means besides their target countries (and because of this they were actually merged in 1976 and today they are called RFE/RL). Because the focus of this study is primarily on Hungary, from now on only Radio Free Europe will be examined.
3.3 The Mission of Radio Free Europe

When RFE started, its necessity was questioned by many, since the U.S., and also other Western European countries were already having a complete functioning network of broadcasting in Eastern Europe, like BBC and the above mentioned VOA, and had broadcasts in the languages of their target countries too. However, the existing radio stations were listened for other reasons and only RFE was appreciated for its democratic oppositional status and the fact that it was airing news not only about the country were it was originated from but also about its target countries. Another fundamental difference was that RFE could provide its audience with an alternative to their media, controlled and heavily censured by the Communist governments. (Puddington, p. 5) What today’s young generation cannot even imagine in the world of information flow: only the information from the single-party state existed through two means, the printed press and the radio. (Skultéty, 2008) Therefore, the radios were also functioning as “subsidiary” source of information. (Puddington, p. ix) The fundamental aim of the establishment of RFE was to inform the people isolated by all means from the world, that is, basically to provide news service. (Skultéty, 2011, p. 31)

During the Cold War, it was an accepted view that both RFE would have greater credibility if they had appeared to be privately funded rather than supported by U.S. government. (Wasburn 1992, p. 26) Because it seemed RFE was initiated and founded by private persons it was able to broadcast what the society thought and could be seen as neutral and independent from the state unlike other stations. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 28) Although the hidden reality was much more complex than this, therefore this question will be examined in greater detail during the following chapters of this study.

3.4 The Foundation of the National Departments

The NCFE started to create its organization at a good pace; various departments were organized one after the other. These departments later on developed into extensive institutions. It was obvious from the beginning that the target countries of RFE will be Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 21)
July 1950 they managed to begin broadcasting on a limited basis. The timing was very symbolic. The very first radio broadcasting started 4th July 1950, which is the Independence Day in the U.S. They broadcasted towards Czechoslovakia in Czech and Slovakian. The very first program was not too much more than an announcement of the regular program plans. The daily schedule began July 14, Bastille Day – “the European symbol of revolutionary action against state tyranny.” (Puddington, 2000, p. 17-18) Finally, the first few hours long broadcasts started on July 14 to Romania, on August 4 to Hungary and Poland and on August 11 to Bulgaria. (Nelson, p. 46 and Borbándi, 1996, p.23)
4. The Hungarian Department in the Early Years

4.1 The Voice of Free Hungary

“This is Radio Free Europe on the 16th, 19th, 25th, 31st, 41st and 49th short-wave bands”

“I remember Otto Indig’s words:

We should always do a great job in challenging communism, but we musn’t over do it, or we’ll be out of work.”

(Skultéty, 2011, p. 26)

Hungarian broadcast started from Munich 6th October 1951. Csaba Skultéty describes the atmosphere of the first times: “John Wiggin introduced us to the work. (...) At our first work conference, he pointed to the table in the middle of the room: “Ladies and Gentlemen, what you see there is a microphone. (...) When you will speak through this microphone you should not think about the Hungarian people as a whole but to the one miserable person, who, in the nook of his room, looks for help and support in his everyday life through the information you provide him about the world.” (Skultéty, 2011, p. 24)

The chief of the Hungarian service became Gyula Dessewffy and his deputy became Lajos Thury. RFE’s first director was a man from the world of advertising, Robert E. Lang. From the beginning scripts were written by the exiles themselves because Lang wanted to give them freedom to express their own ideas and views. However, this way it was not ensured if the scripts were competently written, were not overly polemical, adhered to standards, and did not deviate from political line. Although there were some talks about adopting some sort of censoring and initially the FEC (Free Europe Committee) tried to review the scripts before they were broadcasted but it was proven to be too overwhelming and was seen as an obstacle of the “authenticity of the exile voice” so it was discontinued not too much later on. Instead, scripts were reviewed after they had been aired. Broadcasters were given wide authority and independence. (Puddington, 2000, p. 43) Skultéty writes in his book: “In retrospect it is astounding how independent a new editor
could be, and how wide their range of authority was. The decisive element was their judgement
capabilities. There were some guidelines, but nothing was mandatory.” (Skultéty, 2011, p. 38)

The living conditions of the Hungarians were extraordinary that time. Here is an entertaining
story about the situation in Munich in the beginning: “The Hungarian Department consisted of 140
people at launch, this – along with family members – meant about 180 people arriving in Munich.
Munich as all other German cities was in ruins, and the people needed housing. The occupying
Americans in cooperation with the Germans started building service housing, and the employees at
RFE gradually moved into these apartments. These were simple compared to today’s standards,
but were considered a luxury in the time of suffering, and they were built fast and were thus exact
replicas of each other, down to the last spoon. This is how one evening the deputy chief editor
found company in his apartment, and after some time, pulled his wife aside, and asked her: “Dear,
when are the guests going to leave? I have an early day tomorrow”. This wife in turn replied
“Lajos, we are the guest; we are at their place, not the other way around”. Lajos had accidently
went to the wrong floor.” (Skultéty, 2008)

Regarding the program: for the first time in the history of Hungarian broadcasting there were
news every single hour, always in ten minutes (except Sunday and other holidays). The news was
the spine of the program. (Skultéty, 2011, p. 32) The news always had the highest number of
listeners. This was no coincidence since people usually took the risk of listening to RFE to find out
what was going on in the world. The main goal of the radio was to ease the isolation of the
listeners, and only after that came the initiative to try to influence the moral and the events. In
accordance with this, the shows that had strong radio personalities and that dealt with Hungarian
everyday life were the most popular. Reflektor by Gallicus (Imre Mikes), Balint gazda (Bálint
Czupy) an agricultural show, Sándor Márai’s Sunday letters, the short lived “Fekete Hang” and
also Bálin Boda’s (Miklós Lázár) fictional Hungarian reports from New York (Borbándi, 1996, p.
64- 5)

The program schedule was divided into two broad categories, two different methods and
principals applied. One focused on the theme and genre, the other on the different layers of the
listeners. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 62) The first consisted of programs aimed specific audiences
(workers, peasants, young people, women, religious groups, art lovers etc). The second category
consisted of programs with generalized anti-Communist themes (e.g. the program called The Other
Side of the Coin offered refutations of party propaganda). Actually all program contained some
political message. For example, a musical program of the Voice of Free Hungary included a composition of Béla Bartók which was strictly banned by the communist leaders. (Puddington, 2000, p. 48)

In 1953, the international and the Hungarian political situation changed drastically. This meant Stalin’s death in 1953 and Imre Nagy’s speech held in the parliament in 1953. This changed the Hungarian Department’s attitude and it presented new challenges. (Simándi, p. 37) The Voice of Free Hungary, how the station was initially called, was an enormously popular station in the first few years; some surveys even claimed that the listenership was over 50 percent, this means more than half of the population was listening to RFE programs, which indicates a great influence on the population. Some signs were already warning for future crisis: In June 1955, the American legation wrote a letter in which the “overly propagandistic tone” of the broadcasts was sharply criticized and warned that RFE “symbolizes for the Hungarian people the active interest of the American government in Hungarians and Hungary.” The popularity of the station made the diplomatic corps more worried than anything else. Of course, on the RFE side the report and the concerns were said to be unfair and attributed them to the fact that the radio was indeed sometimes complicating the diplomatic functions. (Puddington, 2000, p. 95-96) Maybe in the light of the later events they would have taken these criticisms more seriously.

4.2 The 1956 Debacle

Although the Polish October in 1956 represented an extraordinary challenge for RFE, the leader of the Polish broadcasting team Jan Nowak had enough experience how to handle carefully a potentially inflammatory situation, as he had been a major participant in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, about which also the rest of the staff had vivid memories. Unfortunately the same prudence was not characterizing the Hungarians, and neither RFE staff was “as tightly disciplined” as the Polish broadcasting unit. RFE’s Hungarian Department experienced its saddest days after the Revolution. Not only because of the fall but also because it was a common and widespread criticism that also the Hungarian broadcasts contributed negatively to the events and made the wounds even deeper. The role of RFE Hungarian broadcasts is still a controversial question
although after several investigations there is still little evidence of deliberate incendiary effect. (Henze, 2010, pp. 15-6)

Csaba Skultéty phased the reasons behind the debacle with the following words: “The epitome: the interests of the US state that was operating the radio, or the interest of the Hungarian nation. Those two coincided from the second the radio was founded until its disbandment, for the exception of the time of the Hungarian revolt of 56. The intent to liberate the people under Soviet oppression was not just empty rhetoric: the goal through “roll back” politics was an openly advertised and supported program. Washington, especially days before a presidential election, was indecisive and could not risk a Third World War. (Skultéty, 2011, p. 93) Probably these reasons also had important role in the confusion which finally caused the 1956 debacle and why this question become so debated later on.

The story of the 1956 Revolution, the Radio’s role in it, and its criticism - all of them are controversial, well-known and well-researched areas. Number of books were published about the questions what happened exactly at the Radio during the days of the Revolution: were they really provocative, did they really encourage and incite Hungarians for the fightings and gave them false hopes, did they really say Western help will come, what were the Department’s mistakes, what went wrong exactly, why, and who were responsible for it. As this debacle had such serious consequences on the RFE’s reputation, various foreign institutions were investigating the events and published their findings. Because of the limited size, this study will only deal with the opinions and aspects of the Radio’s employees, how they saw this sad chapter of their Department. These questions and how the Hungarian Department finally came back from this deep crisis will be examined in the following chapters of this study.
5. The Impact of RFE

As it was mentioned in the beginning, the impact of Western Cold War broadcasting (both on societies and on the Communist regimes) is one of the core research areas of this study. It is a rarely examined field and can only be investigated through indirect ways. But it is possible to get an idea through documents from archives including Communist Party Politburo, Central Committee discussions of broadcasting impact and propaganda countermeasures, secret police assessments and efforts to penetrate the Western broadcasters, directives on jamming, secret audience surveys, Party and censorship office press guidance on countering on broadcasts and assessments of the impact on the Communist armies. (Johnson & Parta, 2010, pp. xi-xii)

A usual comment from the era of Cold War: “They taught me at school that it was forbidden to listen to the Radio Free Europe, but how can we know what’s going on in the country when our press, radio and television lie?” (Ash, 2010, p. xv) East German spymaster Markus Wolf wrote in his memoirs: “Of all the various means used to influence people against the East during the Cold War, I would count Radio Free Europe as the most effective.” This effect is so remarkable that it is hard to imagine that any single medium will ever again have the singular importance that short wave radio broadcasting had in the CEE region that time. (Ash, 2010, pp. xv-xvi) Today, in the information era, the technology has changed irreversibly and there are thousands of channels of information competing for attention. It is unrealistic to imagine that a single actor could gain that much influence again and this makes RFE’s impact unique and unrepeatable.

It took time for the impact to become evident. The early evidence was impressionistic and ironically was mainly the result of the Communist counteractions – in fact for many years their response provided stronger evidence of the effectiveness than information from any other source. The most direct evidence was undisputedly the jamming. Other kind of response varied broadly: Czechoslovak, Polish and also the Soviet media carried sharp denunciations and some personnel were condemned to death. Initially the Hungarian regime was more reserved than others. Later on the evidence became more indirect: for example there were arguments against the content of programs without actually mentioning them and former crimes of radio personalities were revealed surprisingly. (Henze, 2010, pp. 9-10)
Another measure of the radios’ impact was the magnitude of the resources the Communists devoted to countering the broadcasts. Johnson lists how many types of efforts the Communists regimes tried to counterbalance the Western Radios, for example: “technical interference (jamming), reprisals against listeners, various other efforts to discourage listening, blocking the flow of information to the Radios, penetration of the Radios with agents, intimidation of Radio staff, public and private propaganda and disinformation to turn European public opinion against the Radios”. (Johnson, 2010b, p. 185) These efforts will be followed during the history of RFE in Hungary during the examined period.

In the 1950s, the only evidence of the impact was primarily letters from listeners, limited surveys among refugees and counterattacks in regime-controlled media. From the beginning of the sixties, the audience surveys among more than 150,000 travellers to the West and secret internal regime surveys indicated a remarkably large regular audience. (Johnson, 2010b, p. 184) In the first half of the 1950s, Communist regimes tried to prevent private, solitary listening. Instead of that, they organized communal, compulsory listening events at work places. The basic aim was to provide opportunities for “trained expert agitators” to interpret the official voice of the regime. The public loudspeaker was a frequent phenomenon not only in small villages but also in Budapest. The best-known photograph about this is probably the one of large crowds around the loudspeaker after the victory of the Hungarian soccer team over England in 1953. (Rév, 2010, pp. 239-40)

Another spectacular direct effect in connection with the radio: during the mid-fifties, balloon operations were at their peak. The target countries were first Czechoslovakia (“Operation Veto”), then Hungary (“Operation Focus”) and finally Poland. East European governments had to face with a new set of frustrations. Populations were mobilized to collect and destroy leaflets and strict measures were announced to punish anybody who passes them on. Communist regimes claimed that the balloons were endangering aviation and protested to international air authorities but no incidents of collision between airplanes and balloons were ever confirmed. Balloon operations were bought to an end after the dramatic events of 1956. Later on materials became more carefully tailored (books, magazines etc.) and were sent through other methods – by post, trade channels or travellers. (Henze, 2010, pp. 14-5)
5.1 Jamming

The already mentioned most direct Soviet response to Western broadcasting was jamming which technically means “transmitting a continuous noise on the same or an immediately adjacent frequency as an incoming radio signal in order to make the incoming program unintelligible”. This began in 1948 and during the following years, Eastern European counties followed this example. To counter jamming, in December 1950 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning jamming as a “violation of the accepted principle of freedom of information and a denial of right of all persons to be fully informed”. However, in the same time there was already an existing international law, which made illegal the transmission of any material, which threatened peace so the Soviets simply interpreted Western Broadcasting as threatening material and a harmful propaganda against peace. (Wasburn 1992, p. 30)

Nevertheless jamming is considered as a poor strategy. First of all, it was relatively expensive. It has been estimated that the cost was six times higher than the cost of the own Soviet international broadcasts and twice as high as it was to the Western side to produce and transmit their materials. (Wasburn 1992, pp. 30-1) In addition, it is important to note that censorship always calls the attention to the banned materials. Even if people were not interested before as soon as it was banned it became interesting. Finally jamming suggests that the state cannot construct definitions and explanations. The influence of jamming will be analysed during this thesis.

5.2 The Audience Analysis Section

RFE created an Audience Analysis Section in 1954 to start systematic research, finally the department evolved into the East European Audience and Opinion Research Division (EEAOR). Radio Liberty also established a research organization called Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research Division (SAAOR). These two were merged into Media and Opinion Research (MOR) in the RFE/RL Research Institute in Munich in 1990. (Nelson, 1997, p. 132)
The primary question of research was obviously a basic one: do the people behind the Iron Curtain listen to RFE? But this was not the only one research area; they were also investigating the followings:¹

1. What role does radio (including regime radio) play in the lives of the target audience?
2. What do the target audiences get from Western radio?
3. In what manner is the behavior and attitude of the target audiences affected by Western broadcasts?
4. What would be the effect if RFE stopped broadcasting?
5. What actions and attitudes of the peoples of the regimes attribute to Western broadcasting and particularly to RFE?
6. How do regime attacks affect RFE effectiveness?
7. Are some aspects of RFE’s activities more disturbing than others?

The composition, motivations, opinions and the size of audience are fundamental questions. From the collected data – many of them will be discussed during this study - it is clearly visible that the radio had millions of audience from ordinary industrial workers to high-ranking leaders too. Based on the collected information it is possible to declare that basically the entire country listened to RFE broadcast: in villages people had no fear and passed on what they had heard with ease, the laborers in the cities were more fearful. Some people listen to it religiously, but only share this with their most inner circle. Some people avoided it intentionally, out of fear, or listen to it with the volume turned down very low, while some others believe it all to be lies. People listening to enemy propaganda in the fifties were severely sentenced in Hungary. Just like during the war, listening to Western radios was deemed a criminal activity. The leaders of the party honestly believed that discussions, opinions coming from the West had a real effect on the majority of the population (hence the heavy sentences) (Vámos p. 126-7)

5.3 Interviews

To measure the impact of international broadcasts analysts, pollsters and researchers could only rely on interviews since the population itself was politically inaccessible. Thousands of interviews were made with East-Europeans. (Rév, 2010, p. 240) The interviews were conducted with nationals outside their home countries, generally refugees, emigrants, repatriates or legal travellers in the West, but sometimes also with volunteer helpers and undercover agents. Usually a wide range of different classes were present, white-collar workers, workers, farmers, and peasants and so on, as researchers were trying to make the sample as representative as possible. Of course the possibility of bias among those who wanted to please their interviewers always had to be taken into consideration and the detailed discussion of these researches will show later on in this study that there were several other factors, which influenced the objectivity of the results.

Nelson claims for example, that it was unambiguous that RFE was the most popular among the Western radios, but he also warns, in accordance with many other authors and also the researchers themselves, that the popularity was massively influenced by the simple fact that RFE was on the air all day, while the other Western stations (BBC and VOA) were only broadcasted for a few hours daily. (Nelson, 1997, p. 132-133) Another basic problem was what István Rév mentions, the “satellite mentality”, which reflected both on the general situation and on the system itself or was based on “subjective eye-witness reporting”, could give false results and inherent biases. Therefore after this factor was recognized, during the analysis of the interviews of the fifties, the focus was solely on inconsistencies, slips of the tongue and reading in between the lines. This was especially necessary as experience showed that tourists and recent immigrants, who were waiting for their residence permits, tried to please their interviewers and said what they thought was expected from them. Two very important facts were revealed by these methods about the early years: the East Europeans’ notions about the supposed image of Communism in the West and that the majority of the interviewees had been listeners to RFE/RL – therefore it was apparent that their views about the West and their assumptions about the Western image of Communism had been formed by listening to the radios. (Rév, 2010, p. 240-242)

RFE researchers also had personal experiences and sometimes they made surprising findings: “The best picture of everyday Hungarian life (not political) could be best derived by talking to defactors and people travelling through. The grittiest of which was 3 young tough guys
from Budapest, whose escape was so bold and brave, it was amazing – and successful. Two of them had dressed as state political police, and the third as their prisoner. Only the person pretending to be the prisoner actually knew the official procedure and the way through the border. They made it all the way to Munich, and their story was full of words and expressions that we hadn’t heard before (words like “stuff” and so on), so much so, that our colleague needed to provide a dictionary for what each new word meant. I had heard some – now commonly used expressions – there for the first time ever.” (Skultéty, 2011, p. 76)
6. RFE in Hungary after 1956

6.1 The Radio Free Europe Syndrome

The Hungarian tragedy was a setback for both Moscow’s international prestige (especially in Western Europe where leftish intellectuals supported freedom fighters) and both for the U.S. after it became obvious that it “talked a great deal about freedom (…) but then stood passively when the people of a satellite nation took its words to heart”. (Puddington, 2000, pp. 115-6) After Hungary fell, the U.S. was to essentially concede Soviet domination of the region and adverted its attention to Third World outposts such as Vietnam, Angola or Nicaragua. This attention and the questioning of Moscow’s hegemony never returned again to Central-Eastern Europe not even when later on the Poles or Czechoslovaks rose up for their independence and freedom. (Puddington, 2000, p. 89)

The Hungarian fall had other serious consequences too, and the “deepest wounds” were to be suffered by RFE. Before the Revolution, the Radio was a respected institution famous from its credibility and professionalism. This reputation faded away in a second when historians, diplomats, journalists and so many other actors accused the station of having made the situation worse, or in some extreme cases, claimed that RFE actually triggered the revolution through harsh and irresponsible broadcasts. According to Puddington the latter one is unfair by all means and the revolution was most certainly caused by the Communist oppression and not by American propaganda. Besides, another important fact should be kept in mind that Americans typically exaggerate their own power and the power of their institutions. Nevertheless, writes Puddington, the term is now embedded in the Cold War history and the “Radio Free Europe syndrome” phrase became the description of situations when the U.S. incites oppressed people to rebellion without providing them the means of victory. (Puddington, 2000, p. 89-90)

6.2 Responsibility of the Hungarians

Eventually four outside organizations conducted investigations: the United Nations, the West German government, a congressional subcommittee and the Council of Europe. (Puddington,
Today, at this distance of time and after several investigations, is now possible to reach a “reasonably definitive conclusion” about RFE’s controversial performance during the revolution. Puddington writes there is little question that the broadcast violated repeatedly many of the “accepted canons of professional journalism” but there were also mitigating circumstances, for example the intense emotions of exiles, the absence of trustworthy information form inside Hungary and the illness of the chief editor. (Puddington, 2000, p. 90)

There is also an opinion according to which this confusion at the Hungarian Department reflected exactly the same confused state of mind that was present in Washington. Ralf Water the RFE assistant policy adviser at the time said: “Nobody was prepared for the Hungarian Revolution, and nobody knew how to respond when it broke out, including the American government, Radio Free Europe or even the Soviet Union.” (Puddington, 2000, pp. 90-91) The reason why this event found everybody completely and utterly unprepared, why nobody ever thought this could be a possible scenario and did not prepare plans, while the whole radio was fundamentally established in order to encourage the spirit of anti-Communist resistance, is a thought-provoking question.

Borbándi writes that during the revolution the Hungarian staff was completely under the effect of the feeling that they were part of a historical event. Maybe this explains why there was so much verve, rhetoric, fascination, pathos and sometimes orotund and blunt type of talks too. Since they could not take part in the fights physically, they used the words as their weapons: this can be the reason for the huge amount of mistakes and blunders too. But Borbándi also emphasizes many times that this fact could not change too much the direction or the fierceness of the fights due to the simple fact that RFE broadcasts were not listened by the fighters on the streets or by the politicians, who were constantly on meetings and on the roads, but only by those who were sitting at home and were watching the events from a safe distance. Although it is indeed possible that the fighters might have heard some parts of some broadcasts, as many places the radios were put into the open windows, still - according to Borbándi - this could not have such an immense effect as it was claimed later on by many. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 218-9)

Besides, Borbándi listed other very important facts to take into account: although RFE was the most popular radio, people did not listen to it exclusively, and other Western radios had some effect too. Later by listening the dissidents’ narratives it came to light that very often people could not even recall when and where exactly they gathered their information from, and many times, it was proven completely mixed with other sources. Besides it is also a fact that the more people pass
the information the more it transforms and this can easily lead to misinterpretations. On the top of all this RFE was making press reviews from foreign sources. The biggest turbulence was probably caused with an article from the prestigious English journal, The Observer, entitled: Hungary: Grave Fears in Washington: U.S. May be Forced to Intervene. Due to the heavy jamming, only some parts could be heard clearly from this text: “… we have good reason to fear that the Russians have committed to oppressing the revolt in blood. If our fear is right, and the Hungarians are capable of withstanding for 3 or 4 days, then the pressure on America would become unbareable in terms of providing military assistance. If Hungarians are still fighting on Wednesday we will be closer to a world war then any time since 1939.” The report ended with the statement that this is not realistic since the Congress’ approval should have been necessary for such an act and there was no chance for that until the presidential elections in the following Tuesday (6 November). If yes, there would have been a real chance for a new world war. The radio staff at Munich interpreted this, as there was absolutely no chance that the USA would cause the eruption of a world war – this was the reason why they decided to air this article. Unfortunately they should have taken into consideration the circumstances and athmoshpere much more. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 219-24)

There was another factor, which has to be taken into consideration, pointed out István Rév the director of the Open Society Archives in Budapest. He argues that radio is actually a private experience: it affects most people intimately and person-to-person. The “voice coming from the air” has a peculiar effect: as it is very far from the material world so the listeners usually supplement the broadcast from their own imagination – this way radio stimulates fantasy and eventually it can feed hope. According to Rév the jamming was not only an effort to block information but also it was an unequivocal sign of the presence of the Communist authorities in the air. Therefore, in 1956 solely the (temporary and not universal) disappearance of the noise in itself may have also encouraged Hungarians and made them believe that Western help was on the way. The disappearance of the noise was probably one of the most reassuring radio propaganda tools. Likewise, when the jamming was restored in 1957 it was an obvious indication that the old system had returned. Jamming continued until 1964 in Hungary and then appeared again briefly in 1968 after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and was replaced by undirected atmospheric noise after 1972. (Rév, 2010, pp. 245)

According to Puddington after all it is certain that the responsibility does not belong solely with the Hungarian staff but also with the American management and, to a certain extent, the
sponsors in the government too as they did have influence on the broadcasts. (Puddington, 2000, p. 90)

6.3 Changes and Rebuilding Credibility

The information scarcity and the peculiar historical circumstances are not the only reasons of success of the Cold War radios: credibility and relevancy were just as fundamental factors and the biggest advantage compare to the state media. Former RFE director J.F. Brown revealed: “radio listeners lived in a system that bred suspicion of everyone and everything and that only through accurate and judicious broadcasting could RFE and RL overcome these reservations and build a reputation for honesty and accuracy.” (Johnson, 2010a, p. xxv) Credibility and reliability were the main reasons why it was worth risking the illegal listening of RFE. Csaba Skultéty points out the major difficulty with credibility in his book: “Authenticity is a neverending dilemma. There was no opportunity for feedback, no direct contact with the listening audience.” (Skultéty, 2011, p. 35) It is indeed a fact that RFE had to function basically without any feedback from its target audience, which made its mission even more complicated.

In Hungary, the year 1957 started with complete devastation. The fights, demonstrations and strikes were finally over and the new government started to function: the workers committees were ceased, reprisals and arrests were started, Imre Nagy and his companion got into Soviet-Romanian captivity. The intellectual life was frozen and 200,000 people left the country. Gyula Borbándi described this as Hungary was prostrated so as RFE: mistakes, errors and failures got into the forefront, even the ones on the side of the revolution formulated harsh criticisms. Besides, people were full with anti-America feelings and anger as they were immensely disappointed in not receiving any help. RFE also created disapprovals being accused of fostering false illusions. Árpád Göncz, head of state declared in 1992 the followings: “The West did not leave us in the lurch, although the encouragement of RFE was indeed unrealistic. Instead what really happened was that the participants of the revolution forgot about an important aspect, that is, the interest of big powers.” Unfortunately many RFE workers did not take this into consideration either. (Borbándi, 1996, pp. 281-282)

Due to these mistakes RFE was placed under an unprecedented degree of government supervision. The most spectacular immediate change was in the directorate of the Munich
headquarters. Richard Condon was dismissed and replaced by Erik Hazelhoff. William Griffith remained as policy director until 1959. Before the Hungarian Revolution the FEC had an important role in formulating the East European political line and the FEC verdicts were respected. (Puddington, 2000, p. 116) Obviously, after the Hungarian debacle, the system had to be modified and the State Department assumed responsibility for the most important policy guidelines. In 1957 a series of policy documents were issued to provide a framework for broadcasting to Eastern Europe (both for the VOA and RFE) by the State Department, the Committee on Radio Broadcasting, the CIA and the United States Information Agency. Instead of drafting individual country guidelines taking into account the, sometimes, enormous differences between the various countries, and only one basic document was issued with minor variations for the five RFE countries. Therefore, the guidelines were only indications of a much more cautious policy line than actual assignments of political directions. (Puddington, 2000, p. 118)

Even though the ultimate goal was freedom from communism, the short-term realistic objective was “to foster an evolutionary development resulting in the weakening of Soviet controls and the progressive attainment of national independence” – as it was declared in the Czechoslovak guideline. They referred to RFE as “grey” propaganda and that it might sometimes be used for the spreading of “unannounced” government policies. This can be interpreted in two ways: as a hidden political assignment or as a recognition that RFE could continue to criticize certain people or policies to which the American government gave approval. What is certain that during the following few years the State Department was more willing to tell RFE what not to say, than to give any special policy tasks. (Puddington, 2000, p. 119)

Regarding the tone RFE was instructed to “avoid tendentiously negative approach” and was strongly advised to “inject constructive criticism into its commentaries.” Broadcasts were to avoid “inflammatory material, excessive polemics, vituperation,” and a “patronizing or condescending tone.” The strategic goal was mainly to encourage common people and intellectuals to think differently and independently from Moscow, of course only to a degree until prudence permitted. The guidance also recommended that RFE should “seek to keep the people in touch with Western life and thought.” (Puddington, 2000, p. 120)

Among the language services, only the Hungarian was significantly transformed. Not surprisingly the morale was at a low point. A memo written by Paul Henze described the Hungarian staff as “riven by personal and political differences, with editors refusing to work with
other editors in an atmosphere of finger pointing.” Eventually (the already very ill) chief editor Andor Gellért was replaced with István Bede whose experiences in the diplomatic service proved to be extremely useful in the restoration of the team spirit. (Puddington, 2000, p. 117) Gellért was relocated to New York and Bede became officially the director on 20th June. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 282)

The first significant effect of the government’s guidelines was that the identification of the language services had to be changed from Voice of Free Hungary (or Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania) to Hungarian (or Polish etc.) service of Radio Free Europe. The Polish Department vehemently protested because they were convinced this step could been seen as a concession to Gomulka, but the State Department was determined in this decision and wanted to ensure that RFE will never be seen again as a representative of political opposition or as an outlet for dissident opinion. (Puddington, 2000, p. 120) The signal “Szól a kakas már” was replaced by “Tiszán innen, Dunán túl.” In the meanwhile, the Hungarian Department got a new, “beautiful” task as Ekecs described it. As 200.000 left the country, between the exiles and their families, relatives and friends who stayed at Hungary RFE became the connecting bridge. Thousands and thousands of letters arrived to the editorial office and for long months, the Musical Messages became the most important program of the broadcast. (Ekecs, 1996, pp. 74-75)

Between 5th and 7th January the inaugural session of the Hungarian Revolutionary Council took place, which was not indifferent for RFE either as it was expected to deal with also the 56 activity of RFE. Even William Griffith appeared personally on the meeting. Finally, the Council condemned the role of RFE and stated: “the activity of RFE at the time of revolution was not favorable: it got into contradictions, disregarded the situation of Hungarians and the power structure and presented unrealistic plans.” After this, two members of the session traveled to Munich for discussions with Bede, Griffith and several other Hungarian colleagues, and declared that the news service must stay objective under all circumstances. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 283)

After 1956, several refugees of the revolution were admitted as consultants to RFE (they are referred as the “56 consultants”). (Ekecs, 1996, p. 75) Some of them even got a job in the programs. As soon as they were able to see into the work processes more, on 14th January Griffith requested them to share their experiences, opinions and advices. They had to answer to ten questions in writing, amongst others: how could the program stay objective, should it stay objective even if might harm Western interests, should the name be changed to Radio Free
Kossuth, how much should the radio approach the Kádár system adversely, is the influence of the audience desirable and possible, how should be the news service. To mention a few opinions that describes well the attitude of the “56 consultants”: Szvatkó Pál mentioned Churchill as an example for objectivity, a personality who never tried to hide disappointments or problems but it was still sensible from his speeches that he was deeply convinced that his truth would finally prevail. Besides, Szvatkó also added that the tone should never be provocative or challenging. Zoltán Nyeste emphasized that despite the events the situation regarding news accessibility in Hungary has not changed at all, the country is still isolated from the West, therefore news service is still fundamental but it should definitely stay depassionate and objective. A basic principle should be that the radio is not a guiding but an informative organ. Kálmán Potoczky also shared this opinion and added that – to draw a lesson from the events – in commentaries, personal and editorial opinions should be sharply distinguished and the sources should be indicated in all cases. Regarding the name change, three voted on yes, two voted against but the question was rather an informative one, nobody considered this possibility seriously. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 284)

An inner inspection and self-criticism started as well, a group of editors persuaded Bede to convene a two or three-day long editorial conference. Bede agreed and after he consulted with the American leaders, the dates of the assembly were announced: between 8th and 10th February the whole editorial office were present in Feldafing where the conference was organized. There was a complete agreement on the question that RFE in 56 “failed the exam and made irreparable mistakes”. However regarding what conclusions should be drawn from this the opinions differed in many respects. One side imagined this with only moderate changes in the program and in the staff, while the other side (particularly the ones who “stood on the left from the middle” and the new colleagues) required radical transformation and personal changes. The two sides were extremely mistrustful with each other, one side worried about their positions (obviously those who were criticized because of their actions during the revolution) while the other side wanted to appear forceful in order to get through the reformation they thought was necessary. The editoriate neither later become really united but finally could adopt a memorandum that reflected a sort of compromise. Griffith’s presentation discussed very important questions, amongst others he mentioned that RFE has arrived to a new phase and nevertheless it remains as an oppositional radio station, history showed this role is very limited. Besides, Griffith agreed with the writer of the Christian Science Monitor, an American journal, that “RFE’s task is to tell the listeners what to
know, not what to do.” (!) Further important statement was that “on 23 October no way the
dynamism of events could have been impeded; therefore the effect of RFE was not decisive as it
was not able to provoke any Western actions.” Finally, Griffith emphasized that since 1953, the
fundamental political line has been the gradualism and it should still remain like that. To the
question what would be the policy of the radio if a new revolution would erupt Griffith answered:
“New York gave definite instruction that only news and analysis of news could be aired, no
position would be taken in inner, political or military questions.” The questioner continued:
“Would we tell there is no hope?” Griffith answered: “Not directly but indirectly yes, through
news and commentaries we should make them feel it.” To the question how much the American
leadership is willing to take responsibility for the mistakes: “We are all responsible. Naturally the
initiative has always been started from the Hungarian Department. The American leadership’s
mistake was that they selected this department and neglected the control far too much.” The
majority of the participants at the conference thought Griffith’s speech was worth considering but
there were serious reservations about how he tried to decrease significantly the responsibility of
Americans while – according to the RFE staff – it was obvious that not all of the initiatives started
from Hungarian side. By the end of the conference, the already mentioned memorandum was
finalized, in a form of a letter to Bede, in which the staff promised to consider the criticisms.
Besides regarding the Americans the letter declared: “We find it desirable that the Hungarian
editorate should receive continuous and clear information about the US politics in connection with
Hungary.” (Borbándi, 1996, p. 284-287)

During the conference the news of the death of Miklós Horthy arrived. The story how this
not insignificant news for Hungary was presented illustrates very well the atmosphere of the
times. Csaba Skultéty was on duty at the news service in Munich. He received the information not
too much after the 3pm news block started and naturally, he broadcasted it immediately at first
place. Right after that in order to get official approval and to inform his superiors he called on
telephone the hotel at Feldafing where the conference was held. When he was called on the hotel
half an hour later he got the instruction that in accordance with Griffith’s order the news should be
immediately replaced from the first place to somewhere in the middle of the ten minutes news
block. This is how the death news of the Regent for more than a quarter century of Hungary was
presented to the Hungarian audience four minutes after the meaningless “most important” news.
(Skultéty, 2011, p. 101-2)
In March more than a dozen broadcasters and editors were dismissed\(^2\). At the beginning of
the month Bede was invited to the US with the obvious-but-not-expressed aim so he could be
informed about the dismissals. Allegedly Bede could not influence the list substantially but what
he did was informing the Americans that the dismissal of Julián Borsányi and Gyula Borbándi at
the beginning of the list might have labour law consequences since they were the service
representatives of the union-management work council that made them immune from dismissal.
Borbándi and Julián Borsányi, the infamous Colonel Bell could stay this way. (Borbándi, 1996, p.
288 & Puddington, 2000, p. 117) His radio name obviously could not stay and Borsányi had
already announced in January “Colonel Bell was executed without any court-martial trial.”
(Borbándi, 1996, p. 283) The dismissal was expected but the list of names surprised and incensed
everybody because – in contrast to the promises before – was not consisting of the perpetrators of
the 56 mistakes but was made completely arbitrarily and (according to Gyula Borbándi and Géza
Ekecs too) the names of those were there whom the writers of the list did not favour for some
reason. The Hungarian Revolutionary Council protested against the list at the US State Department
because four members of the staff were listed (Imre Vámos, Béla Horváth, and József Molnár
editors and Ernő Király researcher) who were explicitly moderate during the revolution and who
had democratic beliefs and were close to the Council too. The directorate tried to cover the politics
in the decision and explained it with cutbacks. According to Gyula Borbándi this obviously could
not be justified as interestingly enough none of the Americans were dismissed. (Borbándi, 1996, p.
288-9)

The dismissal made such indignation because neither the American government nor RFE
leadership were willing to admit their responsibility and made the Hungarians to be the absolute
scapegoats front of the public. However, the system of approval worked during that time – if not in
advance, afterwards always. During the two weeks of the revolution the political department,
although would have had the reason for it, but never stopped any programs and never disabled any
editors. According to Gyula Borbándi the Americans noticed the mistakes only after they were
externally criticized and started to talk about the responsibility of the Hungarian Department only
after they could not figure out other arguments in excuse of themselves. Borbándi thinks this was

\(^2\) Eight editors (Miklós Ajtay, Béla Horváth, Miklós Lázár, Viktor Márjás, József Molnár, Károly Szakmáry, Zoltán
Thury, Imre Vámos) a researcher (Ernő Király), a broadcasting director (Géza Földessy), a newscaster (Anna Duka) a
secretary (Piroska Szegő) and a translator (Ellen Mikéné Imre)
an “inglorious and shameful” chapter of the history of the radio and after these events the new era was an empty phrase and promise since innocent people were dismissed while sinful people could remain. Further explanation is for this not being an accident that during the following decades when the role of RFE Hungary in RFE was discussed the speakers of RFE always told that the repartitions of mistakes happened with the entrainment of the guilty ones and with the opening of the new era. Among the dismissed editors, Viktor Márjás, who was the fierce opponent of the enhancement of tension against Imre Nagy, could work as an external associate as a correspondent in Paris and book critic for a few more years for a constantly dropping salary, when finally in 1974 he committed suicide. Ajtay could not even become an external associate. The others were a bit luckier: Horváth, Molnár and Vámos could work for the radio indirectly through the Hungarian Writers’ Association; Lázár, Thury and Szakmáry returned to the U.S.; and Király started a new life in Munich. György Kemény was relocated to London as an economic correspondent. (Borbándi, 1996. p. 289-90)

Further important changes happened in the staff: in the middle of May Károly András arrived to Munich from New York and on June 20 he was appointed as deputy director. The Hungarian Department consisted of 100 members at the end of 1957. In New York, the new leader of the Hungarian section became Zsigmond Gyallay-Pap who was transferred from Munich and the New York centre of FEC moved to Park Avenue. The press department after the finish of the balloon operations in 1956 published flyers to Hungarian exiles entitled Hungarian News (Magyar Hírek) and a Hungarian-English language book. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 290-91)

Regarding the programs, the arrival of Károly András coincided with the American advice that the Hungarian Department should deal much more and in a more detailed form with the Western political, cultural and social events. The style of the programs also changed, they became more ‘radio-like’ with faster pace and consisted of more outside broadcasts and reports. More and more foreign commission took place. The new program structure started on January 13 and still contained lots of messages from exiles, who wished to send their words to their relatives, friends and acquaintances. Therefore every hour there were twenty minutes (!) messages twelve times (!) a day (RFE was a bridge between the exiles and their relatives for long time after the Revolution). RFE broadcasted relatively lot of music too, mainly operas, orchestral works and chamber music. The next program structure started on June 2, by this time only 10 minutes of messages a day. The quantity of music did not decrease but the style became lighter with more jazz music. The political,
cultural and entertaining programs started to have more important role, although the Hungarian political topics were still set aside. The third program structure started 29 September with new programs for example the English lesson, the “Post Box” (Levelesláda), the “Political Letter” (Politikai level), the “Cultural News” (Kultúrális Hiradó), or some other new music program. Besides the program discussed in details the arrests and reprisals in Hungary and with the still vivid western sympathy declarations and protests. In May 1957 Gyula Borbándi became the editor in chief of the literary and cultural programs. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 291-93)

During the second half of the presidency of Eisenhower “liberation” was not mentioned any more. The emphasis was gradually placed to development and to bigger independence from Soviet control. The American propaganda (offically through VOA, non-officially through RFE) became more modest. As the official policy was communicated many times it was declared that there was no opportunity for a military intervention to reach liberation, the distance should be kept from negative criticism, none of the political ideologies can be accepted (neither the Workers’ Councils’), the RFE can not be the radio of the Hungarian emigration, and that they find the small steps politics to be worth considering. Regarding the Soviet Union bigger independence should be aspired for but it should be also kept in mind that gradual development was a very slow process. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 294)

6.4 Europeanization and New Principles

At the summer of 1958, when Erik Hazelhoff became the European director of RFE, the centre transferred from the U.S. to Europe and the role of Munich became more important. In practice, things were decided in Munich and not in New York any more. Before, the long-term policies were originated from the political advisor in New York and were sent to the political department and to the office of the program manager in Munich. After 1958 the process turned over and the policies were sent from the director in Munich who discussed them with New York and the leaders of the national departments. In the program politics, the adjustment started to the new American policy line, which supported Eastern-European liberalization. This resulted in less propaganda and more professionalism. James Brown (the chief of research department and ulterior director of the radio) said the “romantic heroic era” has come to an end. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 304)
Because of the success of the first conference in Feldafing, the meeting was organized again in 1958 and in 1959 as well. The principle topic of the former one, which took place between 31 January and 2 February 1958, were the new policy lines. The participants were concerned with Europeanization: they dealt with questions like how to handle the idea of European unity and how to portray that RFE functions in Europe. Objectivity and high standard remained as fundamental objectives. At the end of the conference European director Hazelhoff and the political advisor, Griffith declared that RFE, unlike the state radios, could criticize even those things that might be supported by the American government at certain cases. At the next year’s conference, from 30 January to 1 February 1959, the main topic was the tone of the broadcasts, the propaganda, and again, the objectivity. According to István Bede the relocation of the centre to Munich resulted in greater influence for the directors of departments. But a clear policy line was missing and caused uncertainty as fundamental things were not unambiguous such as whether the American politics wants to sustain the status quo or not. There were talks about the fact that internal politics was put aside compared to external politics and, despite the 56 disappointments, it would be still important to maintain the trust towards the West – more programs should be dedicated to the lives of Western Europeans, information, analysis and background reports too. Bede informed the American leadership about these proposals but no substantive change took place. However, the structure of the programs changed, the variety became greater and the broadcasts became more enjoyable. RFE was still the most up to date station even in politics-free topics, like the death of Pope Pius XII and the election of Pope John XXIII in 1958; RFE anticipated local news with hours. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 304-307)

A few days after the second conference, a more rigorous system of script control was proposed by the American directorate to ensure broadcasts had adequate tone. There were also extreme ideas for example the review of all scripts before the broadcast or the use of American master scripts that would have been then translated to various languages. The plan was so unpopular that the leaders of departments started to protest heavily against it, they felt their independence offended. The director of the Polish section Jan Nowak was actually preparing a petition campaign, with the threat of a collective resignation (!) because the exiles considered the idea as impending censorship. The plan, which was finally adopted, was therefore much more moderate and secured large degree of autonomy for the RFE broadcasters. The Broadcast Analysis Division was created, a unit that analyzed scripts after they were aired and then issued cautions or
warnings if broadcasts were not delivering the required professional standards or departed from the political line. (Puddington, 2000, p. 117)

As Americans were trying to give heed to the advice of the Committee of the European Council, (which was examining also the 56 broadcasts), to include also Europeans to the activity of RFE, the West-European Advisory Committee was founded in September 1959 in order to facilitate the relationship with Western European countries. Americans were unwilling to share their rights for command and control and figured out this organization as a compromise. The support of significant European politicians, (like Robert Schuman, French ex-president, Oskar Helmer, Austrian ex-minister of internal affairs, Sam Watson, English trade union leader, Randolfo Pacciardi, Italian MP and Paulo A.V. Cunha, Portugal ex-minister of foreign affairs) helped a lot to the prestige of RFE through this organization. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 249)

On December 31 1958 William Griffith, who had been the political advisor for almost 8 years, left the radio. The new advisor became Richard V. Burks, who was extremely well informed in questions regarding the CEE region, as he used to teach history of Eastern Europe. The title of the position ‘political advisor’ was later modified to political director. On March 1 1959 FEC had a new president after Colonel Crittenberger had left, Archibald S. Alexander. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 247)

In the summer of 1959 the decision was made about lowering the budget of the company by 18%. Since the diminution of expenses could not cover this much, new cutbacks have started. The directors of National Departments should have presented the names but they collectively denied doing it. Bede offered to freeze the unfilled jobs and this way managed to achieve that only two Hungarians were dismissed. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 249)

In the meanwhile technical development was continuous too, the number of transmitters have increased. In 1957 there were 22 while in 1959 there were already 27. The transmitters broadcast with such a big power that technicians said it was enough to neutralize 85% of jamming. The towers were transmitting on five wavelengths 2700 hours of broadcast weekly and the number of staff increased to 1400. Twelve news agencies were working in Europe. According to a 1957 research between 1954 and 1957 there were more than 6000 communist attacks against Western radios, 89% of those against RFE and RL. The jamming continued too. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 247-8)
Regarding the broadcasted programs the following ones had extremely high number of audience: the reports about the execution of Imre Nagy and his companions (although RFE never admitted its mistakes regarding how they completely misjudged the role Imre Nagy), the consequences of the disembarkation of Americans in Lebanon, reports about the world expo in Brussels, the New York radio plays, and the interview series with the defendants of the Rajk trial who were sentenced to life imprisonment. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 309)

In the summer of 1959 a survey was made in which the six most popular programs had to be named by the respondents. The most popular was the News, which received 26%, then the Reflektor with Gallicus with 20%, the music 20%, commentaries 16%, Farmer Balint (Bálint gazda with Balint Czupy) and other agrarian programs 10-10%, and religious programs 8%. As a radio personality Gallicus and Farmer Balint were the most popular. (Borbándi, 1996, p. 309)

6.5 Counteractions During the Late Fifties

In 1958 the number of attacks by the Hungarian Authorities drastically increased. According to Borbándi it could be partially attributed to the fact that radio programs were criticizing passionately the second nationalization program, the forced collectivization of agriculture after the revolution, and the defencelessness of pesantry. The Communist press was talking about the “misery of Western countries”, the “economic crisis of the United States”, “the horrible destiny of Hungarian refugees” and the “Middle-East imperialist aggression.” (Borbándi, 1996, p. 309)

Just like in 1955, in 1959 the official diplomatic corps were still anxious in the region because of the radio. Jacob Beam American Ambassador to Poland requested the stoppage of RFE. He claimed that the radio was giving false information, its tone is far too propagandastic, it has no effect at all and it harms the American politics. The Central European diplomatic corps were criticizing RFE broadcasts very often because they felt the constant criticism of regimes endangers the success of their negotiations. They were asking for the moderation of the critical tone. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 248)

Probably one of the strangest and most shocking attacks took place in the autumn of 1959. A poisoning attempt employed not only RFE staff but also the public. The canteen of the radio was suddenly closed and it turned out only weeks later what had happened. It was said that the
perpetrator was one of the employees of the Czecoslovak consulate who gave two saltcellars filled with anthropine to one of their contacts at RFE, to smuggle them between the normal saltcellars (anthropine is a poison made of various alkaloids of plants and can hardly be distinguished from normal salt). The attempt did not succeed as their contact happened to be a double agent (!) and reported the case immediately to the authorities. The case was followed by harsh media reaction but the police investigation ended without result in 1960. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 250-51)
7. RFE in Hungary During the Early Sixties

Puddington writes that from August 1961, when the Berlin Wall was created, to 1968, when upheavals in Poland and Czechoslovakia emerged, it was a relatively calm period in Eastern Europe. This time organized dissent hardly existed and there were no leadership purges or popular upheavals either. Despite the decreasing Cold War tensions and an increasing East European cynicism over Western intentions RFE was undoubtedly the most popular foreign radio station in the Eastern block. A survey conducted in 1959-60 by several research institutes showed that RFE had far more regular listeners than either the VOA or the BBC. BBC was considered to be the most objective station but RFE was the most influential. After the Revolution the VOA suffered a remarkable decline in listenership. Their management ordered major restrictions for example critical commentaries on internal affairs had been prohibited and the program was concentrating on world news, American culture and jazz music. (Puddington, 2000, p. 132)

In 1961 the Hungarian Department had 82 employees (the research and monitoring department belonged to the central register that time). As compared to the other departments, the Polish Department had 95, the Czechoslovak 88, the Romanian 29, the Bulgarian 24 employees. There were altogether 1140 employees in Munich, 90 employees in New York and 375 in Portugal. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 263-64)

Amongst the broadcasted programs the number of messages decreased since the majority of refugees was settled down and the postal traffic got back to normal, but around the holidays the number was still high. For example before Easter 1960 the Hungarian Department has transmitted more than 600 messages. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 256)

The main events of 1961 started January 20 with the inauguration of President Kennedy. Then the next main event was on 13 August, when the construction of the Berlin Wall started. During the following weeks the wall and its international commentaries were in the centre of the broadcasts. During the autumn of 1961 more and more signs were indicating the widening of the oppositions between the Soviet Union and China and in January 1962 the RFE directorate ordered the Hungarian Department to dedicate extra time in the program to this conflict, which was realized in 20 minutes after midnight. Gyula Borbándi got the task to translate and edit the original documents. As he writes in his book the reason of this was unclear even for him, since inside the
Society bloc these oppositions were denied and it was difficult to notice the signs of any conflicts even from the Chinese or the China-sympathizer Communist press. The directorate of RFE on the other hand was convinced that the conflict is serious and its open eruption is more than certain. Finally the programs were made and broadcasted too but according to Borbándi were not more convincing than the evening short summaries. This is why he thinks, “the documentation wasn’t meant for the audience, it was meant more for the party members who received it from the MTI, because they wanted to draw their attention to the deteriorating relationships between the two great powers of communism. (!) (Borbándi, 2004, p. 257)

During the autumn of 1960, serious personal conflicts erupted at the Czechoslovak Department in which the Munich directorate had a controversial standpoint. In the end the debate caused the resignation of director Hazelhoff. On 1st May 1961 his position was taken by Rodney Smith, the former FEC president from New York, who remained in office until 1966, and served for the longest time as director of RFE. Under his leadership the role of national departments increased. The president of FEC, Archibald Alexander also left the company and John Richardson Jr. took his position. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 256) At RFE team spirit remained high due to the steady leadership of John Richardson and General Smith. (Puddington, 2000, p. 132-3)

The research and evaluation work has changed too. Until the end of the fifties the department functioned as a part of the news and information section and supported the national departments with data and background information. The change was mainly James Brown’s merit, who arrived to the radio in 1959: first of all the research, analysis and information evaluation were divided and then these became independent from the news department. They made analysis, background reports, press reviews and thematic summaries, not only for the radio but also for others. From 1961 the direction of RFE programs gradually came under the supervision of the RFE director, in which the research department was great help. The unification of the national research sections caused huge resistance for the Hungarians, they even threatened with a walkout. Finally the parties could make an agreement and the separate section could get greater independence. It is important to stress that unfortunately the Hungarian editors did not really utilize the opportunity by the research department; they barely used any of their services. According to Gyula Borbándi the cavalcade of the everyday work in the editorial office did not allow any deeper research, editors mainly used their own knowledge in making the broadcasts. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 265)
Skultéty remembers this period positively: “I feel like our news department was optimistic in doing its job. This was then underscored by an internal poll in the early 60s. An expert from New York had all the nations daily newscasts translated. He put the Hungarian in the top place, head and shoulders above everyone else.” (Skultéty, 2011, p. 45)

7.1 The Peaceful Engagement and Prudency

By the beginning of the sixties the American foreign policy and also the RFE’s program policy had to admit that the alteration of the Eastern-European states and the creation of a democratic system were not possible from outside. They had to accept that the only feasible way was the diluting the communist institutions by winning small liberties, broadening the countries’ ability for action and the decrease of their dependence from Moscow. According to Archibald S. Alexander the then director of FEC, open opposition had weakened since 1956 but it still exists secretly and manifests itself in actions like the rejection of nationalization, the evasion of economic regulations, and the damage of state assets. Violent liberalization is out of the question and any type of result can only be achieved by gradual ease. RFE will continue to broadcast until the “liberty of the press and opinion is born; tools are created for the society through which people can access news and formulate critical standpoint similarly to free societies.” American did not really have other choice in practice than the peaceful engagement – a term created by two scientists, the already mentioned William Griffith and Zbigniev Brezinski, the ulterior director of the Office of National Security. They advised in the American foreign policy journal, the Foreign Affairs, that engagement should be realized to both directions: also to Communist systems and also to the people. According to their expectations this would lead to the formation of a neutral zone of countries in which socially accepted political systems, which is in no contradiction with the Soviet Union, would evolve. When it seemed that in Hungary with the leadership of Kádár something similar is formulating (without the neutral zone) the number of followers of the peaceful engagement ideology increased significantly. In the Hungarian editorial office the idea of peaceful engagement had not too many followers but people were wise enough not to express their skepticism. Due to their prudence their work (and the whole RFE) received recognition even from
President John F. Kennedy who expressed many times how valuable he found the work of the radio and called on the Americans to donate in order to keep it alive. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 252-253)

In October 1962 the most important point of the Hungarian policy lines was probably the one in which the directorate had expressed their opinion, according to which the Hungarian Revolution was not a complete failure, moreover, just the opposite, it showed where the borderlines that Communist leaders cannot cross are. Namely, the revolution had more phases, and the Soviet Union decided over its suppression only after the demands for neutrality and free elections were announced. Until that point, the program of insurgets was more or less acceptable for many of the communists (!), for Kádár too. The political directorate stated this means that changes can be achieved but only by small steps, gradually. Accordingly, the new first aims should be the release of the ones imprisoned in 56, and the gradual withdraw of the Soviet troops from the country. The existence of the Kádár system should be finally acknowledged and its actions that are in favour of Hungarian interests should be quietly admitted. The political directorate emphasized that this policy carries some risk too as it might suggest moral compromise to some parts of the population and could give credit and legitimacy to Kádár. Although the risk did not seem to be too big, as by looking at the history of Hungarians, they had lived under foreign rule for centuries and still, the patriotism and the adherence to language, religion and traditions never decreased. Moreover they added that in suppression – in order of survival – some sort of cooperation is inevitable, but that cannot be considered as moral commitment. After the 56 experiences the Hungarian Department was ready to accept these guidelines. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 253-54)

Between 15 and 17 December 1962 the fourth conference in Feldafing was organized. Here the director of the Hungarian Monitoring Department, László László, had a presentation, which was a profound analysis of the changes of program policies at radios Kossuth and Petofi, their new program structure and the modification at their news service. According to the final conclusion the programs were still influenced by tendentiousness and favoritism. Besides, at the conference there was a very useful debate on how to judge Kádár’s politics. Gyula Borbándi states that in the analysis the judgement was much more favorable than the way it seemed in the programs. This could be explained, according to Borbándi, by that commentators were extremely prudent and handled all changes with reservations in order not to raise too big hopes and cause disappointment. The starting point was that allowances inside Communism do not change the essential conditions of life. Although it had been suggested by many that the denial of favorable processes would create
the negative sensation that the revolution was in vain. And favorable events really happened also according to the central analysis published after the 1962 congress of MSZMP, the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, which states: “Kádár makes much more steps towards inner political relief than any other satellite leader.” (Borbándi, 2004, p. 255)

7.2 New Challenges

At the beginning of the sixties some new challenges emerged and despite its popularity RFE had to make serious efforts to keep its audience. After the tragic events and seeing the West’s passivity, East Europeans were politically exhausted. In the meantime the Communist governments could impose order and the authorities’ material conditions became gradually better too, a nomenklatura class emerged. This class was certainly not attached to Communist ideology but it attached its wellbeing to the maintenance of party rule. The Communist press also became much more proficient and covered the news more extensively and professionally – sometimes it was RFE who was late and not the officials! And not to mention the other huge challenge, the television, which had just been introduced to Eastern Europe. (Puddington, 2000, p. 132)

RFE Audience Research Department was also researching the effect of the television on listening to Western radios and published a report about their findings in 1963.³ During the research more than 3000 interviews were made altogether. In the 1960/61 sample no significant difference in listening or TV-viewing could be isolated therefore researchers concluded that TV viewing had not influenced existing RFE listening patterns. Meanwhile in the case of the 1962 sample had some significant results, most importantly it was determined that “there were no significant differences between TV-viewers and non-viewers with regard to over-all listening to RFE”, however it was also found out that⁴:

a. Among regular TV viewers there were significantly more non-RFE listeners than among irregular TV viewers and they listen significantly less regularly to RFE

³ *Effects of Television on Listening to Western Broadcasters in the Target Area A Preliminary Report, January 1963 (Strictly Confidential!),* HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
⁴ p. 12
b. There were significantly more regular RFE listeners among both irregular TV viewers and non-TV viewers than among regular viewers.

c. Regular RFE listeners were significantly more often irregular TV viewers.

The researchers interpreted these findings with claiming ‘there was no indication as yet that the apparent over-all drop in RFE’s audience in Hungary can be attributed to the impact of television but regularity of TV-viewing do tend to affect RFE listenership adversely’. In the summary the authors claimed: “There are indicators of diminished listening to Western broadcasts in Hungary both in general listenership and in listening to the individual Western stations. RFE appears to have suffered some losses in its overall audience but has succeeded in maintaining its ‘regular’ listenership.” Besides, they also mention that the exposure to television seemed to be comparatively widespread but less than half of the viewers are regular viewers (at least twice a week), although there had been some increase in that. All in all, the number of television viewers grew and it has relationship to regular radio listening but had no significant effect on radio listening habits yet in 1962.

7.3 Successful International Coverages

On 14\textsuperscript{th} March 1964 the disarmament conference of 18 countries’ ministers of foreign affairs started, to which occasion RFE paid special attention: all national departments were represented in the 10 member correspondent team and gave regular reports of the events. Unfortunately the conference did not bring too many results that raise the question whether the high expenses was worth for RFE. But this was more like a part of a genereal consideration of the company: for RFE was always fundamentally important to be present at significant international events and make live appearances and broadcasting, not only to improve the program but also to foster the radio’s international reputation despite the regular negative accusations. This is the reason why RFE appeared also at the World Festival of Youth and Students in Helsinki, which was organized and directed by Communists. Besides RFE was present in many other places too: for example Géza Ekecs started to visit European film festivals more and more often, and correspondents were sent to the Frankfurt Book Fair, the Meeting of Intellectuals in Albach, the International PEN conferences, Catholic and Protestant Congresses and so on. To popularize the idea of European
unity the Hungarian Department made many reports from the beginning of 1963 about the European institutions. (Borbándi, 2004, pp. 258-259)

Sports events were also followed especially because more and more Hungarians were participating at these international events. The Olympic Games were always broadcasted by RFE, also in 1964, when the Winter Games took place in Innsbruck. To the Summer Games in Tokyo the correspondents could not go personally because of financial reasons, but still for two weeks a special section of the editorial office was dedicated only to this event and made several hours long reports every day. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 259)

One of the most successful international broadcasts was the detailed one about astronaut John Glenn, who was the first American to orbit the Earth aboard *Friendship 7* on February 20, 1962. He circled the globe three times. From RFE’s Hungarian Department’s aspect it was a milestone, since this was the first program broadcasted directly from the studio based on live reports of American radio stations and news agencies, with direct interpretation from English to Hungarian. Gyula Borbándi wrote in his book that this was the time when Géza Ekecs’s special ability for broadcasts that required this kind of technological knowledge became apparent. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 259) A comment from a white-collar worker in his early forties praised RFE’s coverage of John Glenn’s flight: “I particularly liked the (RFE) broadcast about Glenn’s space trip. It was real; one could feel that the reporter was on the spot and that he did not merely summarize the events afterwards.”

Probably the most shocking event of the year 1963 took place on November 22 with the assassination of President Kennedy, which obviously got essential role in the program. According to Gyula Borbándi’s memories they received the news that Kennedy was shot not much later than 8 pm. The news of his death arrived half an hour later and the program immediately transformed, and the Hungarians were reporting news and reactions from all over the world all night long in impromptu translation. The program finished at 6 AM but also during the following three days it was almost exclusively about Kennedy’s assassination, life, career, and then about his funeral. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 259) 1964 was again an election year for the U.S. and the Hungarian Department was following the events profusely (RFE sent a special correspondent who followed the election campaign of President Johnson). (Borbándi, 2004, p. 261)

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5 Illustrations of Radio Free Europe's Effectiveness, October 1962, HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
7.4 Listening Patterns and Effectiveness

The RFE research about the listening patterns and attitudes towards the Western radio stations\(^6\) was conducted between the autumn of 1961 and the spring of 1962 and consisted 150 respondents. In the sixties RFE could collect information about the listening conditions and the opinions about the programs from less and less refugees which was great news from the bias aspect. This research was the first one where “escapees” were in minority as the interviewees consisted of only 63 refugees (39%) compare to 87 visitors (61%, travellers with passports). The majority of the respondents had higher education and was inhabitants of Budapest, the rural population constituted only 7% of all respondents.

An important note is that according to the latest regime statistics on radio set density in Hungary had a result that the number has reached 2,5 million – which means statistically that every Hungarian household there was a radio set so the large majority of the population was capable of receiving Western broadcasts. The research showed that 73% listened to Western broadcasts. Not surprisingly the ratio was higher amongst refugees, 81% of them said yes compare to the 67% of the visitors. Regarding the specific stations RFE got the highest result, 61% said they were listening to it. BBC got 47%, VOA got 32% and other stations 21% (relatively speaking as BBC and VOA were aired for short periods while RFE’s broadcast was continuous.) But researchers warned that the audience of these stations overlapped as people were usually listening to more than one stations.

Although on the question, whether RFE was considered as having improved in the last few years, 18% answered yes, but mainly refugees (interestingly enough most of the people refused answering this question) and researchers also admitted these results might have been biased by the fact that the interview was on behalf of RFE. The same situation might have occurred during the question to which refugees named RFE as their favorite Western radio station almost twice as often as did visitors (54% of refugees, 28% of visitors). As a reason for this most respondents (51%) said they preferred RFE because of the diversity and quality if its programs and because of the specific programs. The second most frequent reason was because RFE was considered to be

\(^6\) *Listening Patterns and Attitudes Towards Western Radio Stations of 150 Hungarian Respondents (Forth Report), December 1962*, HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
“forceful, hard-hitting and most Hungarian in spirit” (again, this could be also due to the fact that RFE had a 17-hours-a-day program and this way felt more like a national broadcaster). 93% of respondents said they prefer BBC because of its high quality of the information broadcast (this also had a historical reason as it will be revealed later on).

Regarding the frequency of the listening, those who listened at least two to three times a week or every day was considered to be a regular listener. Once a week, or less was considered irregular. RFE had 72% regular and only 28% irregular listener (these numbers for the other two stations BBC 62-38%, VOA 50-50%). Compare to the 1961 findings the number of regular listeners increased. There is no doubt that certain international events, such as the Berlin crisis (and the creation of the Berlin Wall) contributed a lot to maintain frequent audience.

About the listening times it should be stressed that the farmers, women were underrepresented and the higher occupational categories were overrepresented. This might have influenced the results. Results indicated that most listening took place in the evening hours especially between 7PM and 11PM.

The preference for specific programs was also examined during the research. Respondents were asked to name some specific programs of the station and the willingness of answering was very high only 3% did not want to answer, and on the average each listener named three RFE programs. It is important to indicate that this also shows that people who said they were listening to RFE because of the variety of programs were not talking in generalities alone. The programs that got the highest results were the following in order: News 86%, Commentaries 41%, Gallicus 38%, Farmer Balint 36%, World Mirror 14%, Black Scroll 9%, Press Review 8%, Sports programs 8%, Press and Notes 7%, Musical Messages 7%, Teenager Party 7%, Music 7%. The Black Scroll program was recalled almost exclusively by refugees, the Press Review predominantly by visitors. The Black Scroll program exposed names of especially cruel Communist functionaries and officials at specific workplaces. This way people had the impression that RFE was actually there, inside their workplace and ready to undercover those who are responsible for their sufferings. (Rév, 2010, pp. 251) Program category preferences were: News 84%, Commentaries and other political programs 56%, Press reviews 50%, Information about the West 38%, Music programs 22%, Farmer’s programs 20%, Religious programs 15% etc. Besides, the success of the Teenager Party program of Géza Ekecs was already mentioned in this report: “There have been numerous
occasions during the past years that young people have been led into RFE’s audience through the Teenager Party or similar entertainment programs”

Researchers also asked people what they thought the tasks of RFE broadcasts to Hungary were. Most of them (49%) answered with one of these features of the broadcast: reliable news, reliable information, information about Hungarian domestic affairs. The reasons of the second most popular category (44%) were: sustaining courage and hope, unmasking communists, being anticommunist and counteracting communist propaganda. The majority of respondents (58%) though the station had been successful in carrying out these tasks. Visitors were more critical in this than refugees were (69% of refugees said it was successful while only 39% of visitors) – can be explained by the interviewing situation again: some of them may have felt obligated to express complete approval of RFE. Regarding accuracy BBC won with 55% (RFE got 29% and VOA 19%) but RFE got far the highest percentage on “very much concerned with Hungary”: 79% (BBC 8%, VOA 10%)

The opinions about RFE in the early sixties were very positive.7 For example a tailor from Budapest said: “Everybody in Hungary looks upon RFE and not upon the communist station as the real Radio Budapest.” Another opinion was expressed by an engineer from Western Hungary: “In the present situation one might say that listening to RFE broadcasts is a duty for Hungarians.” A member of a Hungarian delegation mentioned the changes compare to the situation after 1956, he said: “In the noncommunist intellectual circles of Budapest, opinion about RFE has become very favorable lately, and very many people listen to it. The anti-RFE attitude which set in after 1956 has vanished, largely as the result of the intelligent programming policy pursued by RFE...”

7.5 Counteractions in the Early Sixties: Protest and Reprisal

In the spring of 1960 the first Anti-RFE film titled “Boszorkánykonyva” (means Which’s Brew) was made. The viewers were lead to believe that the radio shows were prepared by Anti-Hungarian fascists, Nazis who were in awe of Mussolini and Szalasi. The two “emigration experts” Istvan Pinter and Laszlo Szabo of the newspaper Nepszabadsag reported on RFE in the same manner for years to come. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 261 & Ekecs, 1996, p. 99)

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7 Illustrations of Radio Free Europe’s Effectiveness, October 1962, HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
In 1961 two colleagues Bela Horvath and Imre Vamos publicized an article titled “Objection”. The authors had accused everyone, ranging from the Americans to RFE saying that “they draw in Hungarian literature into their petty cold war games”. The general consensus at the radio was that having burned all the bridges they were trying to establish a basis for their return to Budapest. This in retrospect turned out to be true. They continued their campaign of lies, but due to the manner and lack of truth RFE chose to not address their accusations. The radio also got accused of employing people of the far right. Zoltan Klar demanded that RFE be cleared of such people. Because of the aggressiveness of the accusation RFE didn’t have a response to this either. (Borbáni, 2004, p. 262-263)

A harsh example of reprisals was when on the 12th of October 1961 Aurel Abranyi was captured in Vienna and taken back to Budapest by force, since before the revolt he – on occasion sent information and material to RFE’s offices in Vienna. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison in 1963. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 263)

7.6 Audience Research in 1963

In 1963 RFE published their new findings about the Hungarian listening patterns. This research was extraordinary because the sample consisted of 1143 persons (interviewed during the summer and autumn of 1962) and it was the first which consisted of relatively large number of women, industrial workers and farmers - very important groups of the population which were “consistently underrepresented” before! Besides only 4% (!) were refugees which means this survey was the first large-scale survey from which the possible “refugee bias” was absent, although not completely, since visitors could have been still biased by the issuance of passports and considerations of personal safety – many times these might have added to their anti-RFE views. But this much bias was counteracted – according to the authors - by the presence of workers and farmers whose politics was not as severe and was willing to speak much more openly than the white-collars, who had more to lose since they are at the mercy of the regime. Despite the fact that the majority of respondents belonged to the higher educational and occupational levels, for the first

8 Radio Listening Habits of 1.143 Hungarians with Special Emphasis on the Listening Patterns of Industrial Workers and Farmers, August 1963 HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
time many interviewees came from lower socio-economic groups too (nearly 300 interviews were made). Regarding the age structure, the older groups were overrepresented.

Regarding accessibility 92% of the 447 respondents said they had access to Western broadcasts and had a radio set in their homes. Researchers indicated that this ration is slightly higher than in the regime statistics… Then the great majority (70%) was capable of receiving short wave broadcasts (could be tuned to frequencies between 19 and 49 meters).

Then another group of respondents (667 people) were asked how the Hungarians gain information about events and conditions abroad. The researchers wrote: “The answers showed that Western broadcasts were regarded as playing decisive role”. 71% said through Western Radio. Another important finding was that newspapers (66%) and domestic radio (63%) had also very important role at information gaining. Researchers explain this with the fact that the Hungarian press and radio have improved a lot also probably as a result of the constant pressure and competition with RFE and other Western stations! This competition resulted in more and quicker information and less propaganda in domestic sources.

To the question, which Western broadcaster interviewees thought to be the most popular in Hungary 61% (!) answered RFE, and only 14% mentioned other stations. The authors made an extremely important note: “only in a few isolated cases did respondents claim that no Western broadcaster was popular, even though a sizeable minority of the sample was regime-oriented.”

Then people had to define the reasons for certain stations’ popularity. Regarding RFE most of the respondents said because “everybody listens to, likes, knows this station” (39%) and because it “offers good, varied programs, most interesting, up-to-date information” and because RFE is “the station closest to Hungarians, is ‘in touch’, is the most anticommunist” (11%). Reasons like the station is on the air all day and can be heard on many wavelengths also received 8%. Important to mention that BBC received a significant 70% because “it is objective, reliable and unbiased” – indicated that people still trusted BBC far the most.

Two thirds of the more than a thousand respondents answered they listened to Western broadcasts – even if a significant minority was a regime sympathizer. Moreover this rate is even higher in case of farmers and industrial workers (74-73%). People with higher education reduced the percentage a bit: 47% listened to RFE who had secondary/university education, meanwhile 71% with primary education in this respect, but this ratio still gave a 53% overall audience for RFE. Because the younger generation was underrepresented in the sample, researchers decided to
isolate them and examine their habits separately. The result was a bit lower, 46% of people under
the age of 30 said they were listening to RFE which “may serve as an evidence that Western radio
stations do not merely appeal to an aging segment of the Hungarian population”.

Respondents were asked about their favorite programs again. The answers were based on
“unaided recall” without program lists the authors write it was at times difficult to identify what
specific program the respondents meant as only a small minority could recall program names! In
case if there was a particular radio personality like Gallicus or Farmer Bálint, there was no such
problem, they were easily identified. The authors warn to the fact that in some cases respondents
said “radio personality” names only in order to impress the interviewer trying to prove they knew
the programs, but this can also be attributed to the fact that these names were familiar to them due
to the huge number of regime attacks, which mentioned them by name many times.

- News and commentaries headed the list with 62 and 38% just like in the pervious
researches. Commentaries were described as “informative”, “well edited”, “clear” and
“convincing” – unlike in the past the additional information value was emphasized and not
only the editorial opinions, like objectivity and impartiality.
- Reflector with Gallicus got 29% because of its “sarcasm”, “wit” and “being to the point”. Farmer Bálint got 14% praising it for its “directness”, “juicy language” and his “insight”. A
farmer from Western Hungary said: “Farmer Bálint is the best for my kind; he sounds like
one of us”.
- Reportage-type programs (like World Mirror, Open Mirror etc) got 21% and were praised
both by politically interested and politically passive listeners too. Two opinions from the
preceding group said very informative things as reasons: “In Hungary ‘they’ deal
practically only with the darker side of Western life, and even those are presented in an
exaggerated manner”. The other said astonishingly similarly: “I have always been longing
for the Western way of life. How else could I gain knowledge of this considering that the
home radio only speaks about negative things in the West.” A politically passive
respondent also referred to similar values: “World Mirror offers lively and direct
information on Western life. It does not deal with tremendous problems and is,
consequently, sincere and free of propaganda.”
Press Reviews also got a high score with 15%. One of the respondents said, “I didn’t particularly like any RFE programs but I did listen to the news and the press reviews. I checked what was said in the press reviews against what I was being told in the newscasts, in order to find out how far the news could be trusted.”

Besides the following programs were mentioned too: Party and Politics, Press and Notes, Women’s Program, Technical and Scientific Programs, Music, Cultural Programs, Theater, Musical Messages, Teenager Party, Satellite and Russian Commentary, Economic Programs, London and New York letters

The authors of the research concluded the three questions: “Knowledge of the fact that RFE is the station listened to by “everybody” strengthen the conviction that RFE has a unique relationship with its audience. Similarly, being always on the air contributes toward the image of RFE as the “most Hungarian” station and the one which has the largest following in the country.”
8. The Extraordinary Role of Géza Ekecs

When discussing the sixties one must mention the immense social and cultural changes. Although these changes happened at first in the Western world, later (despite all efforts from local authorities); they crept in under the Iron Curtain. Beat music conquered the world and a whole new era started. Even though the lyrics weren’t understood by the masses the ambience made it through, and it spoke not only to the teenagers, but also the adults at the time – people got under its effect independently from social status, education, occupation, age or anything; beat music was a universal phenomenon. And this new wave of values appeared not just in music, or in other forms of art, but also the way young people interacted, and socialized, the strict, rigid traditional social rules changed, and along came Woodstock, the student demonstrations, clothing styles and fashion changed. Its effect can be felt even today.

The role of Géza Ekecs must be mentioned in relation to the story of the sixties as he was one of the most well-known and beloved icons of RFE Hungary. His famous music program the “Teenager Party” started at May 31, 1959 and became one of the most influential and popular programs in the history of RFE. In the beginning it lasted for 40 minutes weekly and then with the rise of its popularity another 40 minutes every week. The youth was extremely interested in the new Western musical trends, singers and bands. RFE could utilize this desire very well, as it could access easily the novelties as the radio had excellent relationship with the big American music companies and sometimes could access the new discs even before they officially appeared at the stores! In addition it is not a negligible fact that RFE – being a non-profit company without advertisements – did not have to pay such huge royalties as other radio stations. (Ekecs, 1996, p. 79) As always, the younger generation was interested only in the latest things, so this meant a huge advantage for RFE and Géza Ekecs. Like most RFE journalists Ekecs used a radio name to protect relatives back in Hungary. He became popular and beloved as Lászlo Cseke (Borbándi, 2004, p. 246) his real name became known for the audience only decades later (and it was certainly nothing new for the Communist secret service who was aware of this from the beginning…).

Puddington describes in his book how the idea was developed: “Radio Free Europe got into the disc jockey business almost by accident. Károly András, a hard working, nonsmoking, nondrinking, and culturally conservative Hungarian service editor was given the formidable challenge of reviving staff morale and rebuilding RFE’s credibility in Hungary. One day András
complained to a young colleague, Géza Ekecs that his teenage daughter was neglecting her studies while constantly listening to rock music on the American Armed Forces Network. The two Hungarians were impressed by rock music’s power over Western youth and soon talked over the possibility of launching a program to introduce rock to the young people of Hungary”. There was some resistance from older Hungarian editors but finally the American management approved the idea. Géza Ekecs became the disk jockey and he stayed like that for the next three decades. (Puddington, 2000, p. 137 & Ekecs, 1996, p. 76)

Ekecs was not an aficionado of rock music when his program was introduced his success was due to a “youthful, open mind and a unique ability to communicate his enthusiasm” to the young people. Ekecs was initially an ideal cultural reporter as he combined an “aesthetic astuteness with a genuine passion for the new trends in music and movie making”. Puddington also calls the attention to a very special perception how Ekecs thought about his mission: he was not intensely political since he believed it was less productive to natter about the damage the Communists had brought to the Hungarian culture than to talk about new remarkable films in France and Italy and to contrast the exciting developments in free societies with the wasteland that communism had created… Ekecs therefore kept Teenager Party deliberately free of overt politics. Instead of that he decided to play the music young people loved and he was sure they would be alienated by lectures contrasting Western freedom with Communist repression. Based on the thousands of letters youngsters addressed to Ekecs it seems they understood this message. (Puddington, 2000, p. 138)

Besides Géza Ekecs said one of the main purposes of Teenager Party was to help forgetting the 56 trauma with entertainment. This was an important goal also on the other side. But while RFE tried to ease the depressing effect, the Communist politics tried to delete the memory of the rebellion and the temporary victory. Music could satisfy both desires and contributed to the depolitization of interest too. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 247)

Puddington also describes the program itself: Ekecs used the top-forty format popularized by American rock stations. He also played other genres like Sinatra recording or Doris Day but his core audience wanted rock. The program consisted of numerous interesting facts and information about the singers, bands and songs too. He kept his listeners informed about Billboard magazine ratings and shifts, following and explaining changes. He was collecting information from American newspapers and magazines so he was able to tell things like Little Richard’s biography or why Jimmy Hendrix used a particular guitar or even explain about the relationship between
African American history and rhythm and blues. It was also a huge thing that Ekecs could even interview many of the most popular performers of the time including the Beatles and Louis Armstrong! (Puddington, 2000, p. 138-9)

For a few years Teenager Party “enjoyed something of a corner on the Hungarian youth market”. The regime refused for a long time to “poison the minds of its youth with this most execrable example of capitalist degeneracy.” Other foreign stations also broadcasted rock music (it was the staple of Radio Luxembourg for example which had an impressive audience in Western Europe) but the main advantage of Teenager Party was that only Ekecs spoke to Hungarians in their own language. As the program’s popularity grew its airtime was increased until another new program was added to the schedule, which was called the “Afternoon Rendezvous”. The timing was at afternoon because teenagers got home from school that time. (Ekecs, 1996, p.79) The program became so popular that other RFE language sections started music programs too. (Puddington, 2000, p. 139)

During the second half of the sixties the music programs became even more popular, especially the Teenager Party. In addition more people suggested that in between two songs some additional educational or political information could be inserted. RFE never denied that they had some self-interest in the broad music program too: who listened to rock and beat music, listened also to the news in the meantime or at the end of the program. And who started to listen RFE as a youngster, most of the times stayed with the radio for other programs too. (Borbándi, 2004, 269-270)

Regarding the reaction of Communist regime the cultural bureaucrats were infuriated by the popularity of Teenager Party: the young generation of listeners was no prudent or circumspect any more like their parents who were listening the radio discreetly in their homes. The youngsters listened RFE broadcasts openly, in trains, on the street, at the beach, in school… Besides the authorities were especially disturbed with the so-called “sandwich strategy” which meant the placement of the nonpolitical Teenager Party between two openly political programs. This meant the spreading of anti-Communist ideas to the young generation who had no memory before state socialism and therefore were expected to accept the system much more readily than their parents. Finally, Radio Budapest surrendered in 1965 and introduced their own music program in which, writes Puddington, they borrowed heavily from Ekecs even to the point of using his translated titles. For example due to ideology reasons they translated the Beatles hit “Penny Lane” as “Penny
Lane: Street of the Poor”. Eventually it did not turn out well and the station had to apologize after receiving a flood of letters from listeners who knew because of Ekecs that Penny Lane was a street in the Liverpool business district. (Puddington, 2000, p. 139)

Understandably Ekecs was less than pleased by a backhanded compliment from none other than János Kádár. When he was asked about RFE, he laconically said the station “played good music.” (Puddington, 2000, p. 140 & Ekecs, 1996. p 110)

8.1 Letters Sent to Teenager Party

There was a vivid, real relationship between the Hungarian youth and RFE. Ekecs copied the American practice of listener requests and encouraged his audience to write him letters. This was a successful initiative and soon he started to receive a flood of letters. Ekecs writes in his book that the letters were extremly interesting from many aspects. First of all they proved that the sound got through the Iron Curtain despite the jamming. Secondly, the youth (or at least the majority of them) was not interested at all in the social system they were living in, politics did not appeal to them. The openly and unambiguously rejected it. (Ekecs, 1996, p. 83)

Another important phenomenon was that, since writing to RFE from Hungary would have been too dangerous, Ekecs instructed his listeners to substitute code names and mottoes for their real names. Then he announced the mottoes on air when he played the requested songs. He also allowed his listeners to send series of requests: then he played them uninterruptedly so young Hungarians could record their favorite songs. (Puddington, 2000, p. 139) Mottoes were incredibly creative and were collected (together with the letters) in two little booklets: one was Teenager Party – RFE Program which has Captured the Hungarian Youth, the other: Bridge Building – Listeners Response to the Broadcast of the Hungarian Broadcasting Department (hinting that the program of RFE was a bridge between the Hungarian youth and the radio). The booklets were written in English although the mottoes were many times untranslatable puns (like “Fülig Gimi”, “Helyem Sernyó” etc.) and they left them in their original form. (Ekecs, 1996, p. 84)

More and more letters arrived addressed to Ekecs, at first only asking for music but then they became longer and longer and constisted of other topics as well – by this painting an authentic picture of life in Hungary in the sixties. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 247) Letters were addressed to “Uncle Laci” from all over Europe, from Hungarians living in Yugoslavia, Slovakia and Romania,
Hungarians working in Moscow or in East Germany and of course from Hungary proper. As many Hungarians still feared official reprisals many letters were given to travelers and were mailed from Vienna, Belgrade or West Germany. There were letters of all kinds: from simple regards calling him “best friend”, “vitalizing force” or the person who “keeps us falling into despair” to reassurances that the “Budapest rock program was a pale imitation of Teenager Party”. There were even political commentaries like inquiries about political asylum or lamenting that the “Communists always plan in such a way which must lead to failure”. (Puddington, 2000, p. 140)

The number of letters was enormous: in 1964 only the Teenager Party received 950 letters. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 261) RFE’s Research Institute was also examining audience mail⁹. They published their report in 1965 about the letters received from Hungary in September and October 1965. From this report it turns out that the systematic solicitation of mail over musical programs were first started by the Hungarian Department (!) just over a year before 1965. In September and October the number of mails was the highest, RFE received 1062 mails from Hungary only during this two months. In the first 10 months of 1965 over 3000 (!) letters were received. Moreover many times writers were not alone, often one letter represented more persons or groups.

During the analysis of the letters and their writers researchers had to face an unusual problem already in the beginning: unlike the language of the other four target countries, Hungarian language has no genders, therefore it was not possible to determine the gender of the writers from verbal endings. This is why only 62% of the letters could be identified by this aspect; through names or when the writer specifically indicated it. Based on this data the genders were equally represented during September and October 1965: 51% of the letters came from boys and 49% came from girls.

Only 6% of the letter-writers mentioned their age, but based on that limited data 80% of them were between 13 and 20 years old. The great majority described themselves as pupils, students or apprentices. Regarding their residence it must be mentioned that several hundred letters were received from listeners of Hungarian minorities in Romania and Czechoslovakia and 70% of the letters came from originally Hungary (which ratio is probably higher as many times letter were mailed outside the country for security reasons). Sometimes writers asked third persons in the West to forward their letters. Writers often mentioned that they had already tried to send letters

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⁹ Hungary Audience Mail in September and October 1965. November 1965 HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
previously but apparently RFE never received them. Therefore the number of letters sent from Hungarians is presumably even higher than the received ones, which was already a great number. A non-uncommon letter: “…I’m a listener of long standing to Teenager Party, but unfortunately up to now I’ve only once succeeded in getting a request played. Many of my letters must have got lost on the way…” Sometimes writers took advantage of their visits in the West to be able to send their letters: “…Forgive me for my hasty lines – I’ve been here in Vienna and I am writing from the railway station. I’ve had a very nice time and now it breaks my heart to leave freedom behind and return to the far side of the Iron Curtain… I wrote you several letters… but it seems they never reached you…”

Almost all of the writers referred to RFE programs, Teenager Party got 68%, Good Afternoon 15%, Musical Messages 15% (a program through which listeners could send messages to relatives or friends whom they cannot easily visit – these letters mostly came from Hungarians in Romania).

Political content was obviously very small due to the censorship but some pro-Western, anti-regime remarks were made. A Budapest University student wrote: “Hello, Mr. Cseke, I and my friends are just suffering an exceptionally dreary lecture on descriptive geometry at the University and, as always, we are romancing about the magnificent USA…” A male student wrote another example for remarks: “I’m in the lucky position of knowing what it is to have the Iron Curtain behind me… I should like to express my gratitude, and I trust that the day will come when you’ll be the editor of the youth program of a free Budapest Radio…”

The student could not know this day will really come, although much later.

Ekecs continued his program even in the mid-eighties despite his dislike of some of the new trends like heavy metal and rap with darker and more obscene lyrics and he provided less commentaries and translations. When communism collapsed Ekecs returned as a hero to the country he had left forty years earlier. He was overwhelmed that the people recognized his voice in the cabs or in the shops. He was invited to revive Teenager Party on a private radio station in Budapest after RFE finished its broadcasting in 1993. He remained a passionate defender of popular culture’s liberating qualities and argues that American rock music undermined the Communist system. (Puddington, 2000, p. 141)
9. The Mid-Sixties

The mid-sixties – according to Gyula Borbandi – were the years of peace and quiet. The reason was that by that time the new consistent schedule had been developed, and it remained unchanged for the years to come and the work became more and more rutine. Due to the new concepts introduce by Karoly Andras, the shows had been reduced to 7-10 minutes from the previous 20-30, since they didn’t want to overload the listeners, nor was the circumstance of the reception of the radio transmission ideal due to jamming (this was about to change soon). The new schedule contained 60 different shows 15 of which were music shows. There were quite a few very defining and characteristic shows, like “Kalendarium” where Tamas Bogyai which discussed jubilees and other defining cultural historical facts, and Western topics also got a greater role: “Western Letters” where Hungarians living in Western countries would submit letters to be read on the air, the most popular of which were written by Sandor Marai and Zoltan Szabo. There was also a 30 minute weekly magazine that introduced Western countries. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 260-261)

9.1 Listening Patterns Prior and After the Cessation of Jamming

In 1964 probably the most determining event was that jamming was ceased in Hungary! It was not an isolated event, happened also in Romania in 1963, but not in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia; there the relief came much later, only after 1973. The RFE directorate praised the Hungarians, because based on the researches their program was able to address all types of social groups, from simple people to even the intellectuals. Moreover it could generate interest in weak hours in the morning at afternoon and was able to win the attention of youths without losing audience from elders (!). The increase in the number of youth programs did not influence harmfully the political broadcasts. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 262)

RFE’s Research Institute was examining the effects of the jamming to the listening patterns and then the effect afterwards the jamming was stopped in January 1964. They published two extensive and very detailed reports about their findings in which they were examining the changes.
The first report was about the time prior to the cessation of jamming. Two samples were interviewed including a great number of respondents, the first (1143 cases) during the summer and autumn of 1962, the second (1144 cases) between the summer of 1963 and January 1964 (but 90% of data was collected in 1963 therefore the sample is referred as the ‘1963 sample’). The composition of the two samples was extremely similar to each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1962 sample</th>
<th>1963 sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school education</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial secondary schooling</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full secondary schooling</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Education</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emigrants</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 26 or under</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 27 - 39</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 40 - 55</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 55 or over</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although in both samples women and lower educational groups were underrepresented, the authors claim this makes no significant difference since the samples were otherwise extremely similar. Since the majority of respondents were visitors and were returning to Hungary, the authors noted that at times, for their personal security, they might have denied that they listened to Western stations, especially to RFE. Another important feature of the samples was that approximately two-thirds of the respondents were over the age of 40, while the number of young respondents doubled in 1963.

Despite the slight drop from 69% to 64% listeners from 1962 to 1963, the results still indicate very considerable stability in the listening habits to Western stations of Hungarians. The

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10 Hungarian Listening Patterns Prior to the Cessation of Jamming, April HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
fact, that two-thirds of the population listens to foreign radios, proves that the regime did not manage to isolate the country from “pernicious foreign influences” and the decision to suspend jamming might have been at least partially a result of recognizing this – claims the research. The minority who claimed not to listen any of the Western stations consisted of regime supporters, those who had no radio sets and those who were too busy or tired at the end of the day (mostly women who said to be far too tired after the “second shift” – as household work was called those times). The research also reassures the previous findings and claim that the rapid growth of the television sets in Hungary “had very little effect on the overall listening patterns”. Regarding RFE specifically the difference between the 1962 and 1963 results are statistically insignificant, there was a slight drop from 53% to 49%. In both surveys a very large majority (77%) of Western radio listeners listened to RFE!

Regarding age groups all three major Western stations had more listeners at the older age groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-26 years</th>
<th>27-39 years</th>
<th>40 years and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFE listeners</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC listeners</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOA listeners</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authors have a very important comment here regarding BBC since they have nearly twice as many listeners over the age of forty than under 27. They explain this phenomenon with the fact that those who are in the youngest age group are “too young to have listened to BBC during World War II when the station’s reputation was established in the eyes of the European listeners.” Other stations like Radio Vienna, Radio Monte Carlo and Radio Luxemburg served the purpose of entertainment only, mainly with music programs. Listeners between the age of 18 and 26 listened to these stations the most likely, together with RFE’s Teenager Party program, which had its audience from listeners in their early twenties and sometimes even had letter writers at the age of fourteen or fifteen. The surveys showed in both cases that RFE and VOA appealed more too less educated interviewees while BBC more to the educational elite (the previous surveys had shown they wore mostly workers and farmers).
The percentage of regular RFE listeners has remained constant in the years 1961, 1962 and 1963 too (apparent from previous researches) with around 45% - this proportion was the same in case of a 150 respondents sample in 1961 and the 1143 respondents samples in 1962 and 1963! This indicates that the jamming did not prevent listeners from tuning to RFE on a regular basis, which generally means three or more times a week! To summarize the audience of RFE based on the findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary School Only</th>
<th>Secondary or Higher Educ.</th>
<th>1962</th>
<th>1963</th>
<th>1962</th>
<th>1963</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFE</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOA</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of regular RFE listeners has remained constant in the years 1961, 1962 and 1963 too (apparent from previous researches) with around 45% - this proportion was the same in case of a 150 respondents sample in 1961 and the 1143 respondents samples in 1962 and 1963! This indicates that the jamming did not prevent listeners from tuning to RFE on a regular basis, which generally means three or more times a week! To summarize the audience of RFE based on the findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RFE Listeners Prior to the Cessation of Jamming, 1962-1963</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFE Audience Research, April 1964, %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>49</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-26</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27-39</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 and over</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High School Without Graduation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Technical</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Collar Supervisory</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White Collar Workers</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skilled Workers</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Skilled Workers</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewives</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a summary authors claim that during the examined period the listening patterns did not change, moreover the results also “closely resemble” the findings based on a smaller sample interviewed in 1961 (which according to the authors confirms the applicability of their sampling methods too). The authors also mention that since 1961 there was a slight decrease in the proportion of those who listened to Western broadcasts and RFE – but the radios only lost audience from their occasional listeners.

The researchers also mention that a crucially important group of young listeners are largely devoted to musical entertainment. RFE seems to be the most successful because they are the only ones who operates in the language of Hungarians, besides they can provide a “careful selection and grouping in terms of the interests and preferences of the young Hungarians.”

The authors also claim that based on the fact that the proportion of ‘regular’ to ‘all’ RFE listeners barely differed on any educational levels, it indicates that the radio’s “intellectual level” is satisfactory and the broadcasts are not considered to be low-level not even by the “hard-to-please educational elite”. The researchers also suggest that the improved reception conditions would rise the number of highly educated RFE listeners, the findings indicate that the amount of time devoted for intellectuals need not be increased, although with the cease of jamming these programs could be more complex. Besides the authors draw the attention to the essential fact that the regime – “being the prisoner of the myth of the proletarian dictatorship” – cannot address directly the “intelligentsia”, therefore the cultural programs of Radio Kossuth are mostly kept on a low intellectual level. Therefore RFE’s cultural programs may hope to gain a number of faithful followers in Hungary.
The second research was dealing with the same questions after the cessation of jamming. The report based on 791 interviews with Hungarian visitors since the jamming was ended, the interviews were conducted between March and September of 1964. The sample in composition corresponded to the 1962 and 1963 samples so the changes could be considered real and statistically significant. Researchers claim that since the interviews were mainly taken during the summer it had been enough time since the cessation of jamming and the results reflect to a relatively “stable post-jamming picture” and not to an upsurge after the end of jamming. The only difference in the samples was that this time much more young people were interviewed: the age proportion changed from 33% (1962) and 46% (1963) to 63% (!) under the age of 39 and from 67% (1962) and 54% (1963) to 37% over the age of 39. This difference caused some essential changes in the results, mainly in listening patterns.

Besides what was new is that this research was conducted by independent European opinion research institutes (under RFE supervision and using their methods of course), which means that for the first time ninety percent of the interviewers had no connection to RFE, therefore the interviewer bias factor was out of the picture. Although the authors of the research warn that the samples are still not adequately representative of the Hungarian population as a whole! Further indication is that the results of the 1962 and 1963 samples were so similar that only the latter one will be used as a reference point.

From the research we can learn that there had been a slight increase in listening to Western station from 64% to 68% based on the interviews. The authors explain these with the facts that the great majority of respondents had always listened to these stations and only RFE and VOA had been jammed and there is a given number of radio sets in the country which does not allow a greater increase of listeners (authors suppose that due to these facts the upper limit of total listeners in Hungary is probably around 60%!). Not surprisingly RFE’s audience grew from 49% to 56% (!) and also VOA’s from 16% to 22% - suggesting that both of the stations benefited a lot from the cessation of jamming. Considering the fact that 60% is said to be the upper limit, 56% audience of RFE is a stunning result. (An important note from the writer of this thesis that this result must not be taken for granted, as also the authors of the research warned they did not have an adequate

11 Hungarian Listening Patterns Since the Cessation of Jamming (A Preliminary Report), September 1964, HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
representative sample. Still, the result indicates that a significant number of Hungarians were listeners of RFE.)

The most important findings of the survey were: RFE audience grew significantly in urban areas, most of all in Budapest, where jamming was the worst. While the overall increase was 7% it was more than 12% in big cities. Besides, the cessation of jamming did not affect the men-women listenership ratio. According to the authors probably the most significant finding is that a steady increase of young listeners can be observed since 1962. Also, the better-educated people more likely listen to RFE than before. The vast majority of the audience is regular listener, usually tune to RFE 2-3 times a week (only 5% listened less than once a week). Another very significant finding was that there was no more extreme audience overconcentration in the normal peak hours between 7 and 11 PM but listening times were much more balanced, also around noon the ratio was better. This is obviously not only due to the end of jamming but also to program changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Jamming Listening Times</th>
<th>1963 (pre-jamming) %</th>
<th>1964 (post-jamming) %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 7 a.m.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 a.m. – 9 a.m.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 a.m – 11 a.m.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 a.m. – 1 p. m.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 p.m. – 5 p.m.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 p.m. – 7 p.m.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 p.m. – 9 p.m.</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 p.m. – 11 p.m.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 11 p.m.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding the program preferences the percentages represent “net scores” calculated by deducting negative mentions from positive ones during the interviews. The authors found out that there has been no noticeable change regarding news, information-type programs and political commentaries, these are still the most popular programs. On the other hand not surprisingly, entertainment and musical type programs benefited a lot by the end of jamming. Despite the significant growth of popularity of these types of programs, authors claim that RFE’s major strength continues to be its informational and political programming. Authors still note: “…non-verbal RFE programs (Teenager Party, jazz and other music programs) have been eminently successful among the very young listeners.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net Popularity Ratings of 13 Selected Programs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RFE Post-Jamming Research, 1964, %</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflector/Gallicus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reportages – March of Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenager Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Bálint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Today”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music: Jazz and Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific &amp; Technical programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party &amp; Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers draw the attention to the fact that a survey conducted not long ago in Hungary called “inside Hungary poll” proves the reliability of Audience Research findings, since the results were astonishingly similar. For example according to the Hungarian poll 18,3% favored modern
dance music while RFE’s comparative figure was 19%. In another case of a similar program like the “Evening Chronicle” of the Hungarian Radio, which had 40% popularity; the “Behind the News” RFE program gained 38%. Both survey showed that news continues to be far the most popular.

Specific programs were also examined:

- *News* received highest ratings independently from age, sex, occupation – except that the youngest listeners preferred entertainment-type programs. The same happened to *Today* and *Behind the News*.
- *Gallicus* had “across the board appeal” (!) while Farmer Balint was obviously the most preferred program of farmers (76%) but did appeal to other groups too.
- *Reportages* and *March of Time* appealed to all groups also to younger listeners!
- *Church Programs* were especially popular with women, older people and lover educational and occupational groups
- *Teenager Party* was the “big hit with teenagers” (78%!) and those under 25 (69%). The older people liked it less and less. *Jazz and Dance Music* got similar results was preferred by the very young people (67%) and under 25 (44%). Important note that only very few listener above the age of 33 liked these programs.
- *Scientific and Technical programs* were particularly liked by men and young people between the ages of 19 and 32. These programs were not chose by farmers or any single housewife.
- *Men and all age groups, except the very young preferred Party and Politics* (who liked only *Gallicus*, the *News* and *March of Time* from the spoke programs.)
- *Good Afternoon* was a preferred program of housewives but it appealed to a very large audience of both men and women of all age groups. This program had been voted most popular by 11% of RFE listeners only after a few months on the air!
- *Cultural programs* specially appealed to older listeners but it should be pointed out that higher educational and occupational groups did not particularly like these programs.
9.2 Erosion of the Communist Unity?

According to the RFE researchers, seeing the conditions in the Communist bloc at the time of their research, they concluded that “an enormously far-reaching erosion of Communist unity has taken place” since Stalin’s death. Their findings regarding this were published in a report. The development is slow and halting and the communism is still powerful, but the weakening of their rigid totalitarianism is already evident - claimed the authors in 1964! Furthermore they write about a divided communist camp in which there are mutual accusations, condemnation and unrestrained name-calling with an ‘invective vocabulary’ that had been reserved only for ‘Western Imperialists’ before. More importantly there are signs of “De-Satellization” in some countries (most apparently in Romania) and increasing domestic liberalization, governmental and economic decentralization, growing contracts with the West also through more liberal travel policies and so on. Of course authors are fully convinced that RFE was a vital factor in these changes.

The non-visitors’ number (for examples refugees, emigrants and repatriates) had been constantly declining over the years consisting only around 10% in the total sample in the end. Researchers claimed that this way the pro-Western bias of non-visitors and the anti-Western bias of official representatives of Communist countries equalized each other and caused no more significant false results. Besides a special attention was always dedicated to have respondents from all age, educational and occupational groups so they could represent truthfully their country of origins. Due to these efforts samples have improved both in quality and in quantity.

Based on the findings, researchers claim that approximately half of the target area population listens to RFE sometimes and four out of ten do it on a regular basis (at least once a week). Researchers also note that even amongst those who claimed not to listen to RFE many were familiar with the content of the broadcasts. This is confirmed also by what a 29-year-old engineer from Hungary said for example: “Anybody who listens to RFE’s news spreads it as the latest and most authentic information.”

When respondents were asked about the reasons why they tune to RFE and what are the needs the regime radios cannot fulfill, they repeatedly confirmed the following motives:

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12 RFE’s Part in the Erosion of Communist Unity (In the Light of Audience Research Findings), November 1964, HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute, Media and Opinion Research Department, East Europe Area and Opinion Research, container no. 1
1. Truthful and objective information
2. Reinforcement of their belief in Western values (ideational, religious, economic etc. freedom) and maintenance of the ties with the West
3. Moral support to help them keep up hope and courage
4. Someone to counteract the regime propaganda and by this forcing them to take public opinion into consideration and make concessions

The survey results showed an important correspondence: the programs that the respondents liked the best were exactly those, which tried to satisfy the above-mentioned needs. According to the researchers this is a proof for the bond between RFE and its listeners. A 45-year-old Hungarian physician said: “It is still the general opinion back home that Radio Free Europe reveals everything which the official news service is trying to suppress; that is exactly what people are most interested.” Another example for how RFE was appreciated in Hungary what a 42-year-old tobacconist from Budapest said: “RFE has an enormous audience in Hungary, and its prestige is much greater than that of Radio Kossuth.”

Communist rulers would have liked to have absolute monopoly in communication in which they could have decided what and how they would like to share. RFE prevented them doing this by offering correct information, moreover they revealed many times the manipulations of regime radios – up until the point when official radios lost their credibility and the greater majority of the population started to believe RFE and the other Western stations instead. For example a Hungarian white-collar worker said: “During the Cuban crisis I listened to RFE a lot, more than is my habit. More recently, when the Russians were buying wheat in the West, I did the same. I do this every time big things are happening and one particularly wants to know what the truth is.” Another example is what a nurse said: “RFE neutralizes Communist propaganda. Among other things, RFE compels the regime to give the news truthfully. If there were no Western stations, ‘they’ would have an easier time telling lies.” The effect of the radio was also praised by a legal adviser who claimed “RFE’s broadcasts undermine Communist discipline” and also by an agronomist, who said, “thanks to RFE’s influence, the people still haven’t gone communist.”

Another unarguable signs of RFE’s influence is the changes in their program policies and – the most prominent one - the cessation of the jamming. These events were considered as victories for
RFE and other Western broadcasts. A Budapest sailor said about this the following: “That RFE is being taken seriously by the government is shown by the fact that they don’t even dare to continue jamming it’s broadcasts.” According to a physician: “It is to RFE that many people in Transylvania listen, and the audience is growing, mainly because the broadcasts are no longer jammed. People look upon the end of jamming as a victory of freedom.”

Based on the interviews, researchers had the definite impression that RFE’s impact has contributed to many changes. To illustrate this they mention a few examples from what respondents told them. An executive from Budapest said: “Actually I cannot name any specific concessions, but the regime was compelled to alleviate conditions by the fact that RFE made it possible for everybody to gain insight into the Western way of life.” A Hungarian agronomist mentioned a specific example: “RFE’s appeals certainly played an important role in causing the regime to decree an amnesty after the revolution.” A farmer also mentioned the same: “RFE dealt very frequently with the question of an amnesty for juveniles shortly before it was granted.”

Another example for RFE’s contribution: “Owing to certain RFE broadcasts and to the intervention of Csepel factory workers, the government desisted form raising the price of certain goods.”

Since the Sino-Soviet conflict, the struggle for supremacy between the Soviet Union and China, was the major and unarguable sign of rift in the communist camp and therefore was subject of a deep analysis by the Western world. RFE also studied whether the Communist block populations have enough information on the subject. In Hungary 78% in 1963 and 83% in 1964 was aware of the conflict. Researchers suggest that this high degree of awareness can be largely attributed to RFE as the regime media suppressed information about this internal dispute for a long time.

Another evidence for RFE’s effect was investigated through the question during which people had to name what kind of government they would like to see in Hungary. The majority (51%) of the 312 respondents answered Western-type government using adjectives like ‘national’, ‘freely elected’, ‘democratic’ and ‘independent’ to describe it. Besides another important finding was that there was a correlation between the need for Western democracy and regular listenership – 72% of respondents who answered in favor of democracy were very regular (four times a week or more) listeners. The authors of the research claim that after over a half-generation of Communist
propaganda the findings are “heartening vindications of RFE’s defense of Western democratic values and an impressive measure of our success in shaping public opinion”.

9.3 Counteractions: “I was kicked out of RFE”

After the jamming of RFE was stopped, the media campaign against the radio had been intensified, as a part of this campaign a reporter of Népszabadság wanted an article to be written on the Hungarian Department of RFE and on its leader, István Bede. In June 1965 István Pintér who did not have the best image in the west appeared in the so-called English Garden and “checked in at the Hungarian Department from the foyer, after he took pictures of the house from the tennis court on the opposite side.” But he never prepared the interview. Later he published a three-piece series of article of the incident in Népszabadság, titled “I was kicked out of RFE”. According to the opinion of Borbándi, the story had been touched up with the well-known broadside and falsifications. It is true, though, that his absolutely sudden appearance did not make it possible for Bede to prepare himself for the meeting, and thus he first had asked him the questions in a written form, and after that he told Pintér, that he is ready to give an interview but is not willing to talk to Pintér. It was a widespread opinion that he should not have even asked for the question, rather he should have dismissed Pintér immediately saying that if Népszabadság wants an interview, they should send another reporter to prepare it. Others tended to think that the interview should have taken place and RFE should have also recorded it as a possibility to show it should the content differ in future-to-be article. Nevertheless, tourists were the ones who depicted a very interesting picture of the era and the general sentiment: most of the tourists visiting West said that the incident caused laughter in the country and the people took Bede’s side in the affair. Others said that many consider the series to be a lie, and that the interview had been actually recorded but “the paper did not dare to publish it because the leader of RFE probably said such things that could not be published in Népszabadság”. Allegedly in media circles many just did not understand why RFE had not utilized the promotion possibility the interview offered in case published falsified. According to another opinion, people were happy that Pintér was kicked out, since nobody had taken him seriously anyway, and that the article could not live up to the expectations to reduce the popularity of RFE. At the end he added: “after all, at least now we know
the address of Radio Free Europe, we know where to go if we happen to be either in Vienna or Munich”. But it was not easy for the tourists to enter the building of RFE since according to the rumors the Hungarian home affairs’ emissaries take pictures of those entering the building. But according to Borbándi, this could not happen regularly and permanently since too many people must have been used and anyway, it would have been impossible to pick out the Hungarians from among the hundreds entering the building daily. Anyway, the staff of the radio warned the passers by of this possibility. (Borbándi, 200, pp 268-269 & Ekecs, 1996. pp. 99-101)
10. RFE in Hungary During the Late Sixties

According to a survey, 75% of the young people aged between 18 and 25 listened to some western radio in 1965-66. From among them 51% listened to RFE, 33% to the BBC and 32% to VOA. The listenership of RFE was 53% both in 1966-67 and 1967-68. Americans has always tended to take the results of surveys more seriously than Hungarians, these latter did not think them to be authentic being familiar with the circumstances of their preparation (these were clearly demonstrated by the results of audience researches). The popularity of a program did not tell its real quality or value, it only was thought of as a sign of the interest the given topic arouse. On the other hand, Americans relied on these reports in programming, thus there was never real agreement in this matter. Real tensions though had never been felt between the parties since Americans let the Hungarians do the programming. (Borbándi, 2004, p 270).

There was a hige technological development: the number of radio receivers increased as well: according to a survey in July 1950 there were 4,2 million radio set in the CEE Communist countries, while by the end of 1960 this number has emerged to 11,8 million (in addition another one million was estimated as non-reported sets). In Hungary there was a significant and quick increase in the number of radio sets: from 727,000 it emerged to 2,2 million (!). The power of broadcasts has increased too: four new transmitters were installed and increased the performance to 2250KW. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 261) Television had become the biggest contestant of radio programs by the end if the sixties. RFE tried to make up for this disadvantage by flexible programming and the freshness of the news. (Borbándi, 2004, 9 227)

On the ten year anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, in the Fall of ’66, the Hungarian department did not only remember the events with evoking them, but also they prepared a series of interviews with immigrants of ’56. They interviewed more than 20 well-known writers and poets on how they survived the ten years following the revolution and what they created during these years. The series of the interviews were met with great interest, and they were aired the following year, too. Conversations on the effects of ’56 with famous Western historians and political scientists proved to be also very popular. (Borbándi, 2004, p 270).

Some other serious changes happened to the Hungarian Department: László Béry (Balázs Balogh) who was, as Borbándi described, an “excellent public writer who was enjoying a great journalist reputation although sometimes was having debatable standpoints” was retired. Imre
Mikes, the famous Gallicus, the editor of the popular Reklektor also retired, just like Bálint Czupy, the well-known Farmer Bálint. With them two iconic personalities of the Hungarian Department left. Besides, Sándor Körösi-Krizsán who had great knowledge about world communisms’s past and present also left the Hungarian service. All of them worked for the radio for a while after their retirement as external employees. Károly András was replaced by László Feketekúty. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 279)

In January 1967 the fifth and the last conference in Feldafing was held. The 15th anniversary of the broadcasting from Munich and the 10th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution gave great opportunity to discuss the way the radio had passed during the years and the future plans. The plans of the “new economic mechanism” seemed promising and the editoriate agreed that is definitely had elements that can be supported by the radio. The only question is whether these plans will be feasible or not. The program started in 1968 and RFE reaction was in accordance with these discussions – they received it positively but were not afraid of criticizing the point they could not agree with either. The Hungarians admitted they had been several new changes in Hungary which made the life of the population a bit easier but still, these had not affected the fundamental structure of society and the institutions and had not yet fulfilled the demands of the revolution (that is the withdrawal of the soviet troops, the multi-party system and the assurance of political rights). In 1969 the central leadership of RFE was emphasizing “the less the political leadership influence economic processes, there is greater hope for success.”(Borbándi, 2004, p. 272, 278)

By the end of the sixties, the Hungarian Department was able to send more and more of its people on a mission, and as a result the number of correspondents on field had been increased. But this was not always trouble free. 1968 was an Olympic year, and the staff of RFE was faced for the first time with the Soviet campaign started against the radio in the International Olympic Committee. The Winter Games were organized in Grenoble, Switzerland, and RFE got accreditation without any difficulties. On the other hand, the Soviet influence could be felt in the case of the Summer Games organized in Mexico City. Litteráti and Borbándi were the correspondents who were to suppose to cover the games from the event. But the Mexican organizers stated that they do not let into the country people with refugee passports. It is true, that these regulations had been in place since the assassination against Trockij, so only correspondents with citizenship could enter Mexico. Litteráti had no trouble with this, but not Borbándi. RFE did not yield, and finally the organizing committee made it possible for Borbándi to report before the
opening of the games on the finishing of the preparations and the Olympic mood of the city. One of the members of the organizing committee helped him at the airport to avoid the different passport and customs controls, taking him through different rooms; in fact he was literally smuggled into the country. The following day he was provided with a pass at the Olympic Press Center with which he could visit all the Olympic facilities, although he did not get an official accreditation. According to his report, it was evident that the International Olympic Committee and the organizers tolerated his presence, but only on the condition that it has no official proof. Finally with this trick he could after all participate at the Games and could send reports, which he did, and not only on the Games but also on those fatal demonstrations initiated by leftist students utilizing the presence of many foreign journalists. The Olympic program proved to be a success; it then was widely listened to, notwithstanding the time-lag. The popularity of the broadcasts was also strengthened by the results of the Hungarians, who won ten golden, ten silver and twelve bronze medals. (Borbándi, 2004, pp. 276-277)

10.1 Personal Risk of Listening to RFE

Lawsuits and arrests were also a part of the new campaign of Budapest, with which the regime tried to frighten off the listeners from the radio. In July 1967, Népszabadság published a longer article by László Geredy journalist, who, back in 65 had visited RFE and talked to a number of editors there. Returning to Hungary ha was mixed in a so-called espionage story and was sentenced to prison (Zsolt Szabó: The Pupils of Mr. Cseke, Népszabadság, 2nd July, 1967). Kálmán Sándor, a professor in higher education was also put into prison, he was charged with meeting with the “elite of the immigrants” while participating in a scientific congress in Germany, and with smuggling into the country and distribution of samizdat literature. Valter Fleps was also convicted in 1967, with the charge of “providing RFE with data said to be state secret”. A young man from Székesfehérvár was imprisoned for a number of years because “he had lived in the spirit suggested by RFE, and as a result the committed crimes against the state.” The prosecuting attorneys had make out a case against a person charging him with “listening from morning to evening to the hostile political broadcasts and comments of RFE, Voice of America and the London stations in August and September of ’66, doing this so behind the open windows of his kitchen facing the court, and so loud that it could be heard in the court by all others, and the people
living in other apartments of the house were also forced to listen to these broadcasts”. The court put together a conspiracy and espionage case against three young men and two girls who had been sending letters to László Cseke to the address of “Afternoon Rendezvous”. The Military Court of Budapest sentenced the boys to a longer, the girls to a shorter term in prison. (Borbándi, 2004, 274)

While there was no law against listening to Western stations there are stiff penalties for rumor-mongering and the spreading of “propaganda hostile to the socialist order.” Consequently anyone known to be a listener to Western radio stations may easily be accused of having discussed or passed on what he has heard broadcast by an “enemy station”, thereby becoming subject to punishment for “anti-state activities” – claims an official report of RFE in 196313.

But despite these facts it seems for Hungarians listening to RFE was not hampered by the fear of being found out, what’s more 47 of 100 listeners said they spoke about the broadcasts with other people. The researchers listed a few examples to illustrate this attitude:

- A middle-aged farmer’s wife said: “We talked about RFE programs among ourselves, about those which we liked best and those which were of interest to us farmers”
- A young physician said: “RFE broadcasts are often spoken of. People tell one another about the news and the commentaries they heard over the station.”
- A 32-year-old tractor driver said: “I frequently spoke about RFE broadcasts with others, especially about the newscasts and programs about Hungarian agriculture and the Common market.”
- A 42-year-old woman office employee said: “The programs are very often discussed – all kinds of programs. They are generally liked.”

There were indications that people go to one another’s home to listen to RFE (although this was a punishable offense) For example a letter contained the followings surprising story: “Last week, while celebrating the name day of a friend at his home, one of the guests, a policemen,
spoke up: ‘Turn on the Voice of Free Europe, buddy!’ This was done, and we all listened quietly to the newscast, although there were two other policemen among the guests.”

10.2 The Prague Spring

The popularity of the radio had been on the rise, so much so that by the end of the sixties almost all was forgotten about the mistakes of 1956. It was convincing mostly because it carried the news fast on the one hand, and was well-informed on the other hand. People obtained information on the events in Czechoslovakia in 68 mostly from Radio Free Europe, Hungarian media lagged behind with at least a few hours, but sometimes even a few days (!). The content was also satisfactory for the listeners. According to the summary of one of the listeners: “During the past few years there was no important event in the socialist block in connection with which RFE could influence the Hungarian people in a negative way… Although the Hungarian media nowadays covers the events daily, for the people RFE is the authentic source…. It is alarming for the Party that the young people are probably greater fans of the radio than the elder generations. It is serious, more so because the younger generations had been already socialized during the socialist era. Even if they are not convinced that they can obtain the required result with a broadside against RFE, anyhow the give it a chance… these attacks gain the popularity of the radio.” According to the opinion of another listener the broadcasts on the situation in Czechoslovakia had increased the popularity of RFE in Hungary a lot: “It was a good decision for RFE to intermit the entertainment, thus demonstrating the solidarity of the Hungarians with the Czech people in a difficult situation.” It is needless to say that there were such people, too, who were not happy with the low-key mode of the radio and stated that he is not able to understand the “pussyfoot tone”, and said: “even if it switched sides and stood behind the Communist, RFE would still remain a liar, hostile, treasonable and fomenter radio. The leaders of the regime don’t care about objectivity, for the RFE remains what it had been since its first broadcast, an ‘abuser enemy’. RFE will not earn the sympathy of the regime with its cautious tone; rather it will depress the Hungarian listeners.” - he finished. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 275)

According to Gyula Borbándi (and this reflected in the opinions of the listeners too), the programs of the events of the 68 Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion in August, clearly shows that RFE had learned from the mistakes made in 56. The national departments (especially the
Czech) demonstrated such a moderate and responsible behavior that they even received recognition for it. RFE clearly demonstrated that it deeply condemns the participation of the Hungarian military troops in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. On the other hand the Hungarian media washed itself out: their failure had grown into a national issue, so much so that at the end Lajos Fehér, member of the Political Committee and the vice president of the Council of Ministers, had to react to the complaints front of public. He cited technical failures, as he said the telephone connections had been cut with Prague, and they did not want to make rumors public. He also added that “the information provided by the Hungarian media was authentic, factual, (…), while the Western broadcasts (…) were characterized by irresponsibility and distortion of the facts.” (Borbándi. 200, p. 276) Nelson also thinks RFE had learned its lessons from the Hungarian Revolution and “preplanned procedures to ensure the measured content, tone, and quality of the broadcast were put into effect. RFE got nothing but praise for its broadcasting during that period”. (Nelson, 1997, p. 137)
11. Parallelisms on the Two Sides

11.1 The Relationship with Intelligence

In order to get an extensive picture on the radio’s relationship with intelligence first of all its budget has to be examined, how the radio was financed, by who and how the American public was organized into the plan.

The well-known symbol of RFE was the Freedom Bell, which was essentially a replica of the original Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Its dedication on October 24, 1950, was claimed to be one of the most inspirational moments of the Cold War. It was sponsored and, as it was supposed, paid for by a new organization, the Crusade for Freedom that was founded specifically for the sole purpose to raise funds for RFE. After General Eisenhower announced it foundation Americans were urged to contribute to the noble aims of the crusade. Besides Americans were also encouraged to sign freedom scrolls and it was indeed a successful initiative: finally the crusade claimed that thirteen million people signed these scrolls! The dedication ceremonies took place in Berlin as the city was the status of East-West division and the event was meant to reassure the Germans that the U.S. was committed to the reunification of their country. (Puddington, p. 20-21)

The Crusade for Freedom had an extensive and successful campaign: its advertisements could be found everywhere asking Americans to contribute “truth dollars” to RFE. Although it was never openly claimed that the crusade was the only or even the major source of the RFE budget, the leaders, with the consent of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, did not mind making that impression. It was very helpful for RFE keeping the image of a private organization literally supported by the American people. Actually in the beginning even some of the officials hoped that the crusade would succeed in providing the dominant portion of the RFE budget. Unfortunately it turned out pretty quickly, within a year or two, it was a false hope and the crusade never managed to collect more than a small fraction of the necessary amount to keep RFE alive. (Puddington, p. 22)

The organization also had an important role in mobilizing the people to support the government’s Cold War efforts. The U.S. government already had experience from the Second World War where thousands of volunteers were supporting their policies and with the crusade officials hoped to emulate that practice. Therefore the crusade’s real strength did not rest on the
paid staff, which was small in the New York headquarters, but in its network of volunteers all around the country. The crusade did a series of things to raise attention: sponsored parades, completed with speeches by prominent exiles and organized demonstrations of balloon launchings - the most spectacular RFE campaign ever. Besides the crusade also organized trips to Munich for large contributors. By 1954 the emphasis turned from private to corporate sources and after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, when RFE became the target of criticism, the public campaigns were completely abandoned and only corporate fund raising remained. Although with the help of the Advertising Council (an organization established to help nonprofit groups to reach the public) the crusade could maintain its visibility through radio and TV announcements. It is estimated that the Council spent between $12 and $20 million on the crusade’s campaigns until 1972 when the radio was brought under public funding. (Puddington, p. 23)

In 1960 the name of Crusade for Freedom was changed to Radio Fre Europe Fund. In 1961 thez had the objective to collect 11 million dollard for the radio. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 256)

The financing of RFE was such: RFE/RL submitted its budgetary proposal to CIA where the department in charge of the radios led by Cold Meyer examined it, and if needed, made changes in it. The new radio transmitters and high inflation increased the expenses a lot, and as a result there were opinions within the CIA that the organization should in the first place deal with its original activities (i.e. with intelligence gathering and analysis). Some, already at the end of the fifties voiced the opinion that the Congress should finance the radios, but then neither the administration, nor the Congressional Committees had not shown any interest. The reason might have been the attempt to avoid the admission of secret financing. (Borbándi, 2004, pp 247-248)

But the connection was not only for financial reasons. After the broadcast staff was hired the next priority was securing information about the target countries. The development of system of intelligence and file gathering was a critical requirement for RFE. (Puddington, p. 39) In the summer of 1953 an audience analysis section was set up in Munich and in a short time expanded its activity to systematic analysis of both regime media responses and reports from dissidents, travelers, journalists and also businessmen. (Johnson, 2010a, p. 10) RFE did not have paid agents inside the Iron Curtain but they had a network of immigrants who gained information through their own contacts. Besides they also received many information from letters sent to the special Box 52-20 in Munich. (Puddington, p. 39)
Unbelievably by the end of the 1950s RFE’s research contained more information on life and people in the target countries than the Communists regimes themselves possessed! Initially when RFE was set up the CIA offered to provide information on which broadcasts would be based but soon it became clear that the reliable intelligence was too sparse and the classification problems were too complicated. What is more by 1953 the CIA Intelligence Directorate had to acknowledge that the information gathered by RFE itself was so enormous and the analysts were so expert at interpreting it that finally it was the CIA who assigned officers to Munich. Indeed after the CIA network fell apart in Eastern Europe they started to rely more and more on the information provided by RFE. (Puddington, p. 40)

Not too much later RFE became a major contributor to the U.S. Intelligence on Eastern Europe and eventually on the entire Communist world. (Johnson, 2010a, p. 10) Later on RFE was criticized because of the intelligence gathering that they also shared with agencies of the American government like CIA. They had a remarkable collection of material about the communist world and most of them were also categorized and filed away. This archive now is a very important source of information. (Puddington, p. 40)

RFE become a major target of the Communist intelligence services (recently a book has been published also in Hungarian about the secret agents at RFE’s Hungarian Department entitled “Squirrels in the English Garden” (Mókusok az Angolkertben) by Laszlo Kasza). Nevertheless according to experts and also ex-radio associates there has been no major damage and none of these agents affected broadcast content in any serious way. Among the attempts used by Communist to counter RFE’s effect was a campaign to characterize the radio as hostile to German interests and a danger to German internal security. (Henze, 2010, p.12) Borbándi and Ekecs both commonly agreed on that even if there were agents inside the Radio they did not do as much harm as the Radio’s own employees did later on by sending complaining letters to the Hungarian press.

RFE operated in an era of stability till the end of the seventies. There was no public questioning neither of its financing, nor its existence. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 285) The staff of RFE never tried to explore by whom and how the institution is financed. Even if from time to time the question had arisen on whether the donations were sufficient, the thought that the missing money was provided from public sources were enough for the comfort. Although the communist press (and sometimes the western media, too) had mentioned CIA or such expressions like “anarchic
center” or “espionage center” from time to time, these did not make a stir, thanks to the continuous broadside. Nevertheless, there was one place where these statements did raise the suspicion of military intelligence activities, especially in connection with the staff of German and obtained German citizenship that got into awkward situation more than once. Radio correspondents and employees with other citizenship or working in other countries, like in the USA did not have to face such situations; moreover, their work was highly appreciated. (Borbándi, 2004, p. 282)

The financial status of RFE became an international political theme in 1966-67. There was a series of articles on the CIA in the Spring of 1966 in the New York Times, in which it was clearly stated that it supports different ventures, foundations, publishing houses and last but not least RFE, too. This article had not made big a stir either. The stir made was much bigger by the article published in February 1967 in Rampart, a San Francisco magazine, which announced that its next issue would provide information on how CIA supports National Students Association (NSA). Citing this article, the New York Times returned to the topic, and named other institutions financed by CIA, including anti-communist trade unions, publications, and radio and television stations. In ten days the Washington Post mentioned RFE, too. On March 13th, CBS radio and television station broadcasted an hour long documentary in which it stated that who had donated to Crusade for Freedom actually financed the activities of the CIA. The main message of Rampart was that the money of the CIA gets to RFE through legal and guise foundations and the National Security Agency. Finally a special committee was set up led by foreign affairs under-secretary Nicholas Katzenbach to investigate the matter, more so because the efficiency of the radio broadcast was questioned. The committee came to the conclusion that there is a need for the radios because they serve the interest of the USA. Richard Helms, CIA director argued that the private character was only a disguise, the radios were owned by the government and as such; CIA legally finances them. The Johnson administration decided to continue the operation. (Borbándi, 2004, pp 282-283)

According to Gyula Borbándi, the staff of RFE, after the initial surprise, was not preoccupied with the unveiling. Although the connection to the intelligence agency was not too comforting, but everyone had to take into consideration that in its fight against communism, the American administration having diplomatic ties with the parties involved, had no choice but to use secret fundings. The opinion of secret services in the United States had always been different from that of in Europe, since its activities did not only include classic intelligence and espionage but also many other things. With unveiling the CIA-ties, it was also proved that the Western countries
consider a state task the support of the fight against the promotion, intervention and influence of the enemies at least as much as the Communist countries do. It is one of the personal memories of Gyula Borbándi when Istán Szabó told his colleagues raising their voices for being diluted: “You have to acknowledge that there are only two cashiers in the world, one of them in Moscow, the other in Washington.” (Borbándi, 2004, pp. 283-284)

Since the system could not be operated in this matter any longer, a couple of investigation committees were set up to examine what kind of an institution, in what way could take over the task, but there was no decision made for a long time, and uncertainty remained. But this is already the history of seventies, what this study cannot cover due to its size limitations.

11.2 Monitoring

The content of the war in the airways, the thoughts that had been conveyed is difficult has all but vanished. Most of the programs were not recorded; they were more or less live, unless they wanted to rerun it. Recording at that time had a high cost. In the best-case scenario the documents for the programs that were written by hand were kept, but since the political explanation of daily events weren’t deemed as something of value, these documents were for the most part destroyed. Interestingly enough the enemies kept better records of the others’ broadcast. Both sides had professional surveillance and a dedicated staff, listening to and noting the other side’s broadcast. (Vámos, p. 128)

It should be clarified and strongly emphasized that the target audience that was not only the listeners themselves but also their relatives, friends, colleagues and close acquaintances who were also influenced through communication with the listeners. On the top of all this there is a certain, although relatively small, but politically extremely important group of people who could not ignore the impact of Western broadcasts and should not be forgotten. This group can already be assumed based on the history of monitoring. Even during the Second World War MTI, the Hungarian News Agency, already monitored the Hungarian (and even the Romanian) broadcasts of the BBC and Radio Moscow. After the war monitoring included further broadcasters too: the Voice of America, Deutche Welle, Radio Ankara, Vatican Radio and then the English programs of the BBC. Monitoring activities continued until 29 June 1995 (!). (Rév, 2010, p. 246)
Regarding RFE the Hungarian-language broadcasts were transcribed from 1951 to 1989. The secret monitoring service produced summary transcripts for the “Daily Confidential Information Bulletin” that was distributed to selected members of the highest Party leadership. The technical staff was directed to pay particular attention to the following programs:\(^1^4\)

1. Hungarian domestic issues, and how they were perceived abroad
2. The activities of the opposition and the churches
3. Interviews with, and statements by the representatives of the Hungarian emigration
4. The life of the Hungarian minority in neighboring countries
5. International news and commentaries relating to Hungary in the spheres of the economy, social policy, and international statistics
6. Reflections on Hungarian press publications relating to domestic issues, the economy, the activities of the government and the parliament, statements by Hungarian political leaders
7. Opinion of foreign experts about the most important issues of Hungarian political and economic life
8. The role of Hungarian-born businessmen
9. Comparative international information programs, talk shows
10. Presentation of Hungarian firms and companies and economic actors

It is visible that the list was broad and included areas of political, social and economic life too but not everything: until the early 1980s it was forbidden to include texts about the private or even public life of Hungarian or other Communist leaders or texts about problems of succession in Communist countries. Besides the Daily Information Bulletin there were several other regular bulletins too, for example: “Appendix to the Daily News Bulletin”, “RFE-Western radio stations Weekly Bulletin”, “Weekly Bulletin about the Hungarian language programs of Western radio stations”, “Addendum to the Weekly Bulletin about the Hungarian language programs of Western radio stations”, “Military Bulletin – Hungarian language programs of Western radio stations”, “Special editions” and “Expert Editions”. Not to mention that the Departments of the Central Committee, the Ministries, and the “Information Office of the Council of Ministers” had the right to order special monitoring services. For example the Ministry of the Interior obtained the full text

\(^1^4\) Rév, 2010, p. 247
of programs which were based on letters or messages sent by Hungarian listeners: this way they tried to follow the mood swings of the population in order to complete the heavily influenced internal attitude polls, and the reports of Party functionaries and “informal” secret agents. (Rév, 2010, p. 248)

The archives are enormous: there are over 50,000 mimeographed pages of the Daily News Bulletin including more than 30,000 pages of full-text transcripts of RFE programs. The list of members who received the confidential bulletins was allegedly lost after 1989. According to former employees the list was initially small and included only a few dozen people but later on the number increased to 150-300 daily copies and the weekly editions reached even wider audience: it can be declared that the wider leadership of the Party received regular information about RFE’s programs. Based on these facts it is perhaps not unrealistic to conclude that the Communist Party leadership was far better informed about the broadcasts of RFE than even the “most devoted, subversive, anti-Communist private listener”! (Rév, 2010, p. 247-8)

11.3 A Dialogue between Strategists?

On March 24, 1969 a Foreign Propaganda Sub-Departments was set up inside the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. This Sub-Department was entrusted with the monitoring and regular evaluation of the “enemy propaganda”. This “evaluating committee” prepared quarterly reports that were sent to high-ranking officials whose work was related to propaganda or counter-propaganda (international and domestic as well). The reports referred to the Western press and radio literally with only the minimal markers to distance their views from the views of Western media, they used quotation marks like “evaluation”, and the “analysis” of the Western “experts” and “specialists” and so on. Expressions such as: “falsifying the actual situation, Western analysts state…” or “misinterpreting recent developments, they claim…” or “allegedly focusing on…” or “creating the illusion…” were common. The Communist counter-propagandists described the Western media as “the center of imperialist propaganda machinery” and “those who are interested in the loosening of control over the society” and the adjective ‘objective’ became one of the most important negative portray of the Western media in the forms of “those who are careful to convey the appearance of objectivity” and who talk or write “objectively” and so on.
There were important differences between the transcripts and the evaluation reports: the transcripts were only verbatim texts while the evaluations were not impersonal as the members of the committee were known and the head (or deputy) of the Agitation and Propaganda Department signed the reports. The tone was cautious and no longer claimed that the other side was trying to overthrow their regime. Moreover based on the reports it can be clearly stated that by the end of the 60s the Communists did not believe any more that the Western propagandists were trying to incite a rebellion. It was the period when both sides readjusted to long-term coexistence. (Rév, 2010, pp. 249-51)

But the other side was not idle either: RFE also monitored, recorded and transcribed the broadcasts of the official radio stations. The summary transcripts (stunningly similar to the mimeographed to the Daily News Bulletins) were sent as telegrams to Washington. Then instructions were sent to the broadcasting services of the radios how to respond to the Communist propaganda. In Budapest in Gödöllő and in all East European capitals technical staff was busy listening, jamming, recording and transcribing the enemy radio broadcasts and sending daily bulletins to the select group of addressees which had the right to instruct them how to counter the “enemy propaganda”. István Rév summarized this situation in the following way: “What the unsuspecting listener heard in the solitude in his small room while listening openly to national radio or secretly to RFE programs was all part of the same conversation going on above his head between programmers, political strategists, and public opinion experts on the two sides.” (Rév, 2010, p. 252)
12. Conclusion

To conclude the findings of the thesis first it must be mentioned that the above listed information about the history and impact of RFE in Hungary is only the tip of the iceberg, concentrating only on the main events and the most important facts. Still, hopefully the findings of this study provided enough insight into this extraordinary institution to prove, RFE did not only play a special role because of the peculiar historical and technological circumstances of the time but it gained its reputation with its credibility, professionalism, objectivity, relevancy, accuracy and reliability over the years - just to mention a few examples of the most prominent advantages of RFE. The Radio was a result of a truly international effort: it was founded and maintained by Americans, had its headquarter in Germany, from where (and from Portugal) the broadcasts were aired, the program was written and performed by dissident Hungarians to Hungarians also in Hungary and in other countries. Despite this fact, it was still considered to be the “most Hungarian in spirit” – more than the state radio! After the 1956 debacle the lessons were learnt and the Radio could resurrect from its ashes: the emphasis was on the professionalism, the variety of programs to all kinds of social groups, the enjoyable, “radio-like” broadcasts, the successful international reports, the professional live broadcasts, the always up-to-date and reliable information (“the truth”) and – last but not least – on the mission that the Radio has to help the idea of freedom and national independence come alive.

The first hypothesis was that the Hungarian Department of RFE could successfully return after the 56 debacle. As it was mentioned already, the Hungarian Department had learnt a lot from its 1956 mistakes when RFE was accused of actually triggering the revolution through harsh and irresponsible broadcast, making the situation worse, and fostering false illusions. However, according to many opinions, the radio simply could not have that immense effect on the events and these accusations are due to – besides the mistakes of the radio editors being far too emotional - mixed sources, misunderstandings and misinterpretations. There was no sign of a deliberate incendiary effect. After the revolution, an inglorious and shameful chapter followed as according to the former employees, innocent people were dismissed and guilty people stayed. The following years were characterized by gradualism, prudence, reserved opinions and small steps - in order not to raise too big hopes and cause disappointment. RFE continued to encourage people to think differently and independently form the Communists in a far more cautious way. The program still dealt with the Western political, cultural and social events a lot – internal Hungarian political
topics were carefully handled or avoided – as it was still important to maintain the trust towards the West. At the end of the fifties Europeanization started and it meant the end of the “romantic heroic era”, in the sixties peaceful engagement started in which RFE finally arrived to a point when they declared that the Kádár system could finally be acknowledged and its actions that are in favor of Hungarian interests could be quietly admitted to be good. By the sixties the anti-RFE attitude had vanished, largely as the result of the intelligent programming policy. Eventually in 1968 during the Prague Spring RFE was very successful at handling a just as much a sensitive, inflammatory and controversial event as the 1956 Revolution. The broadcasts on the situation in Czechoslovakia had increased the popularity of RFE in Hungary significantly with their moderate and responsible behavior for which they even received recognition. Following the story of the radio it becomes obvious how they took on the new challenges successfully.

The second hypothesis was that the broadcasts had a widespread audience from all social groups. The composition, motivations, opinions and the size of the audience are always fundamental questions. This hypothesis has been confirmed by the audience research documents in which it is clearly visible that the radio had millions of listeners, basically the entire country followed the RFE broadcast, if nothing else, by hearing about the most important events through word of mouth. The program was so successful because it was able to address all types of social groups, from simple people to the intellectuals. Moreover it could generate interest in wee hours of the morning and in the afternoon and was able to win the attention of youths without losing audience from elders, which is usually an extraordinary feat. From the surveys it turned out that the Radio had incredible stability of regular listeners even from the beginnings, which did not change over the years. Due to technological reasons researchers claimed that the upper limit of listeners was around 60%. Based on this fact it is a stunning result that the audience of RFE was 56% in the mid-sixties (although the sample of the research was not representative, still it indicates that the majority of the population was listening to its broadcasts).

The third hypothesis was that the Hungarian program had a determining impact on the whole society, even on the youth. RFE could provide its audience with an alternative to their media, controlled and heavily censored by the Communist governments. Because it seemed RFE was initiated and founded by private persons it was able to broadcast what society thought and could be seen as neutral and independent from the state unlike other stations, which raised its popularity and credibility a lot. When the CIA connection became common knowledge RFE already had a stable
audience who, this did not really concern. Regarding youth the important role of Géza Ekecs was discussed during this thesis. Beat music made him one of the most popular and beloved RFE personalities for decades (he worked for the radio for 40 years!) so popular that the other departments and later on also regime radios started similar programs – RFE’s biggest advantage was that they could access novelties easily. On the other hand the official Hungarian radio had another big advantage: no jamming. Therefore these kind of programs benefited the most from the cessation of jamming after 1964. The entertainment programs also had several other advantages: those who listened to rock and beat ended up listening to newscasts as well. In addition, for the most part those who started listening to RFE as youngsters, eventually got into the other programs as they aged. Ekecs and the Hungarian Department started letter-sending initiative in 1964 and the popularity of the program was obvious from the thousands of letters they received.

The fourth hypothesis was that despite the various counteractions of the regime RFE still remained successful. Counteractions provided evidence for effectiveness and that communist considered the radio as a serious threat to their social order. In the thesis several types of counteractions were discussed from jamming, to reprisals, intimidations, secret agents, propaganda, disinformation – even a poisoning attempt (and later on a bomb attack too!) or the case of Pintér when he was allegedly kicked out of RFE. Lawsuits and arrest happened but rarely, most of the people had no fear. The regime could not falsify the facts as RFE prevented them doing this by offering correct information, moreover they revealed many times the manipulations of regime radios – up until the point when official radios lost their credibility and the greater majority of the population started to believe RFE and the other Western stations instead. From the examples mentioned in this study it is obvious that there was an arsenal of counteractions but eventually none achieved their desired effect, which was isolation of the country from western influence. This is probably one of the reasons of the cessation of jamming in 1964 too. Moreover, Hungarian press and radio have improved a lot also probably because of the constant pressure and competition with RFE and other Western stations! This competition finally resulted in more and quicker information and less propaganda in domestic sources.

The last hypothesis was that RFE could fulfill its original mission and contributed to the disintegration of the Communist Bloc. RFE has contributed actively to many changes in Hungary and to the overall atmosphere; some examples were listed during the thesis. But most importantly
it has been widely praised in both the East and the West as contributing to the end of the Communism in Europe. It is indisputable that Hungarians view of the West and their assumptions about the Western image of Communism had been formed by listening to the radios. The idea of freedom, democracy and independence was kept alive during the entire operation of RFE, which had great influence on the way of thinking and the general attitude of people. These were all important factors in shaping the history of the Cold War and researchers started writing about the erosion of the communist bloc as early as the 1960s. The process was of course more complex, and influenced by many other factors of international politics, but eventually RFE could declare: Mission Accomplished! The mission which was none other than disbandment due the fall of communism.

Gyula Borbándi concludes his book with the following deeply thought-provoking words: “The question of whether or not the Hungarian society changed due to the more than 40 year operation of RFE arises naturally. Unfortunately the answer would have to be: no. Looking objectively most of the signs and social symptoms tell the tale, that the majority of the people of Hungary hadn’t become what they could have, and what the radio personelle in Munich strived for. It kept many defining traits of communist societies: an aversion to responsibility, the expectation of full service free care and limitless benefits to be provided the state, a fear of any major change, the lack of civil courage and audacity in addition to a nonexistent self discipline, the acceptance of abuse of citizens by administrators and clerks at government run institutions, the incapability of efficient administration and bureaucracy, mindless sloppiness and carelessness, and a never ending trust in miracles and a hopeless sense of entitlement to external help.” (Borbándi, 2004, p. 416)
13. References

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14. Appendix

14.1 Directors of the Hungarian Department

Directors:

Gyula Dessewffy 02.08.1951 – 08.08.1954
Andor Gellért 16.09.1954 – 20.06.1957
István Bede 21.06. 1957 – 31.01.1973
József Szabados 01.02.1973 – 30.09.1984
László Ribánszky 01.10. 1984 – 31.10.1993

Deputy Directors:

Lajos Thury 20.08.1951 – 31.12.1953
Viktor Márjás 01.01.1954 – 31.12. 1956
István Bede 01.01.1957 – 20.06.1957
László Feketekúty 01.05.1967 – 31.07.1979
Gyula Borbándi 01.08.1979 – 30.10.1984
Péter Halász 01.10.1984 – 30.10.1987
Barna Büky 01.05.1987 – 28.02.1991

14.2 The Freedom Bell

Figure 1. Replica of Freedom Bell that was distributed to 48 states for use in local campaign. This photograph was used in newspaper releases to announce arrival of state Freedom Bell in local communities (courtesy HU/IEA).
14.3 Pictures from the Book “Cold War Radio”  
– A Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-89  
Richard H. Cummings

Advertisements of the Crusade for Freedom
YES—for just one dollar... a "Truth Dollar" that fights Communism right in its own back yard—behind the Iron Curtain!

Radio Free Europe: "The In Sound From Outside," possibly from later 1960s campaign.

"RFE disc jockeys beam the latest beat and soul hits, as well as interviews with the stars, to East Europe's New Generation." Taken from a RFE pamphlet showing RFE's "disc jockeys," late 1960s or early 1970s (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty).
14.4 Pictures and Subtitles from the Book „Agressive Broadcasting” – Psychological Warfare by Gennady Alov and Vassily Viktorov
Moscow 1985

The subtitles tell a lot about the Communist tone

The hall of the RFE building in Gloria, Portugal. Here one can run into a former Gestapo agent or a criminal offender.

RFE employees sending letters and literature abroad, encouraging people to rebel against their lawful government.

The buildings housing the RFE/RL centre in Munich (Federal Republic of Germany). The aim of the CIA-controlled Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty stations is to sow discord among nations, undermine trust in the USSR and provoke anti-Soviet and anti-socialist action. Their methods are based on misinformation, lies and slander, and their personnel includes spies and provocateurs.

The RFE transmitters in Spain. The CIA has set up its own base of operations here from which it sends encoded messages to US secret agents in southern Europe.
14.5 RFE/RL Today

RFE/RL still operates today in these countries:
map: http://flashvideo.rferl.org/Flashmaps/en-US/coverageOneWin/default.htm

In 1995, the headquarters were moved from the Englischer Garten in Munich to Prague. Since the end of the Cold War European broadcasting has been significantly reduced and currently concentrating countries mainly in the Middle East and Central Asia. RFE/RL currently broadcasts in 28 languages to 21 countries including Russia, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq. (RFERL.org)