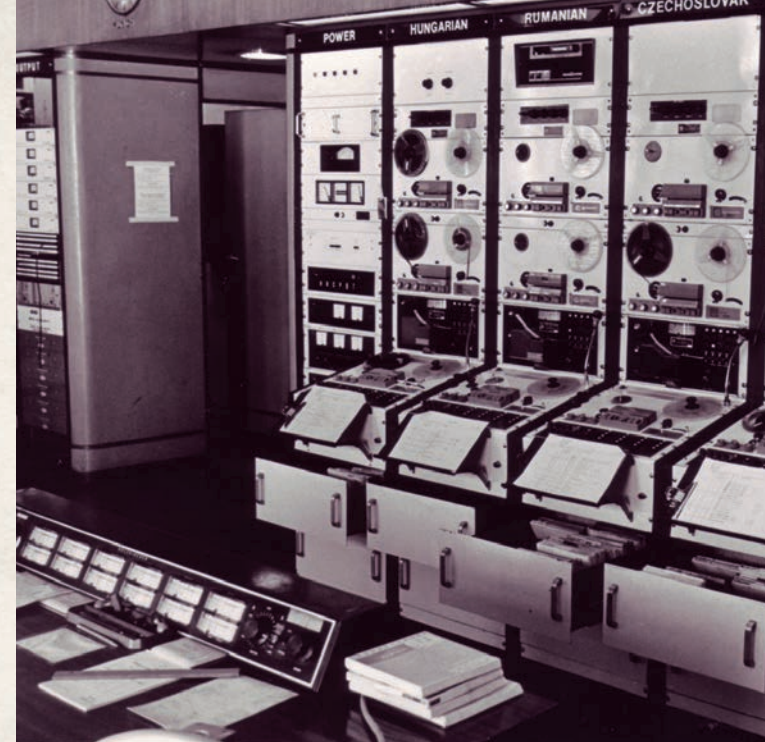


“All of Slovakia listened to Voice of America’s programmes about the church in our country. The most effective defence for the persecuted was international coverage – which the regime was very sensitive about. And as the whole of Slovakia was listening, they were well and immediately informed – this greatly encouraged a sense of belonging.”

Ladislav Stromček, collaborator and secret informer on Anton Hlinka and Voice of America



RADIO JAMMING

As the communist regime regarded Western radio broadcasts as ideologically subversive, such transmissions became a key ‘power race’ battle front in the Cold War. To that end, communist intelligence agents strove to infiltrate radio station editorials. Intentional jamming of radio signal was another aspect of the communist regime’s battle against foreign transmitters. The first such Soviet-style jamming system built in the early 1950s. The first examples of jamming were in July 1949 against the daily Radio Vatican broadcast. The foundations of the “radio defence” jamming interference system – which lasted until the fall of communism – were in Czechoslovakia in 1952. This effort was despite the high cost of blocking Western transmissions for the cash-strapped communist regime. Under the influence of political changes following new Soviet leadership in 1985, Czechoslovakia’s communist party leadership suspended the jamming of foreign radio stations on 9 December 1988.

It is not easy to make a reconstruction of the audience of Western radio stations in communist Czechoslovakia, we can only estimate the numbers. The communist regime in Czechoslovakia didn’t provide audience research, but we have several researches provided by Radio Free Europe. Based on this research, 58% of the audience in Czechoslovakia used to listen

Western radio stations. It is a clear evidence that people behind Iron Curtain were incredibly keen on hearing news from the world. Such radio stations played an important part in the communist regime’s in the autumn 1989. The role that foreign broadcasting played in that process couldn’t be underestimate and forgotten.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Recommended websites:
www.upn.gov.sk; www.enrs.eu



European Network
Remembrance
and Solidarity

• tasr •

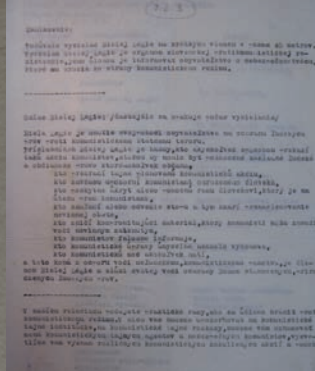
FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS INTO CZECHOSLOVAKIA DURING COMMUNISM

Information monopoly and media censorship were among the communist regime’s central control features, allowing totalitarian structures to maintain power. Communist regimes’ propaganda and misinformation sought to create and propagate the idyll of a “socialist paradise”. However foreign broadcasting into Czechoslovakia disrupted this information monopoly, and provided information to the public over which the regime had no control. Such broadcasts were a key foreign policy tool for the United States to halt the spread of communism, and indeed they ultimately contributed to the fall of totalitarian regimes.

1950s



Jozef Vicen, who set up the transmitters of the White Legion



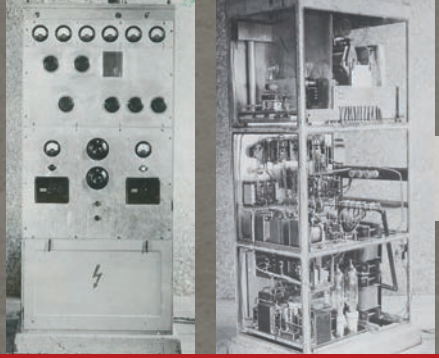
1980s



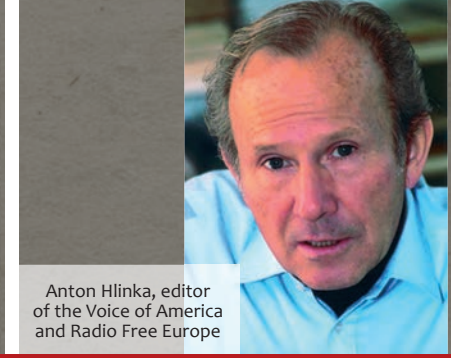
Slovak broadcast of the Vatican radio



Radio Free Europe and Voice of America were the best known radio stations bringing news from the West



Transmitters of foreign radio stations



Anton Hlinka, editor of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe

FIRST BROADCASTS – ILLEGAL TRANSMISSIONS

Illegal foreign broadcasts to Czechoslovakia began in 1945 shortly after the Second World War. The first Slovak broadcast began at the turn of 1946/1947 led by Ferdinand Ďurčanský, who – as a former high-ranking official in the Slovak Republic from 1939 to 1945 – sought to encourage the Slovak public towards restoring Slovak statehood and resisting the emerging communist regime. The transmitter was located in Salisano village (near Rome) and broadcast mostly in evenings.

The White Legion – an illegal broadcaster around which an eponymous resistance movement began – sought to resist communism. It broadcast from April 1950 to May 1955 from the Austrian town of Ried im Innkreis, where American military counterintelligence had its headquarters. Although the latter organisation was aware of and supported this project, the broadcast was the initiative of Slovak exiles in Austria led by Joseph Vicen and partly financed by the Slovak League in America. It emphasized the Slovaks' desire for freedom, a united Europe, and equal relations between Slovaks and Czechs; such broadcasts mainly aimed to encourage opposition to the communist regime. A massive manhunt was initiated against the White Legion by the State Security in Slovakia – resulting in political trials, executions and long prison sentences.

RADIO BROADCASTS FROM THE WEST

Illegal broadcasts were complemented by regular foreign radio station Slovak-language broadcasts from the late 1940s. Vatican Radio played an important role for believers – a designated Slovak editorial started daily broadcasts on 3 July 1949. Its programmes mainly focused on the pronouncements, encyclicals and other activities of the Pope and Holy See, Slovaks' that lived in the free West, Slovak pilgrimages to Rome, and several other key events in the Catholic Church. The communist regime was particularly concerned by Vatican Radio reports on persecutions against the Church and believers in Slovakia and other communist countries. Such broadcasts were among the most popular during the totalitarian period – especially in the mid-late 1980s, and they contributed against the faithful standing up to the regime. A similar structure of broadcasting was common for the editorials of all nations whose believers suffered because of the restrictions in religious freedom during the communist period.

Radio Free Europe (RFE) began broadcasting from Munich on 1 May 1951 with a dedicated Czechoslovak desk – it aimed to be an alternative source of information for those behind the Iron Curtain. As the only one of these stations, it could broadcast for several hours every day, focusing on political, economic and cultural news in communist countries. It could create an alternative to the

communist media. The broadcasters were Czech and Slovak emigrants who – despite efforts to establish a separate Slovak editorial and subsequent protests from Slovak emigrants – worked alongside each other in a common Czechoslovak desk. Although RFE was not directly under US government control, it was partly funded by intelligence services and fulfilled international Cold War policy interests in the fight against communism. Desks from all European states which became a part of the Soviet bloc after World War II worked under Radio Free Europe. Each desk prepared its own programme, taking the specific development in their respective states into consideration.

Listeners behind the Iron Curtain could also tune in to the Voice of America, which delivered daily international news. Unlike Radio Free Europe, the Voice of America was limited to short news programmes and did not broadcast throughout the entire day. In the 1980s, the Slovak editorial staff included Anton Hlinka, a Salesian who brought listeners up to date with religious life in Slovakia including key events, pilgrimages, and the Candle manifestation and other protests. Other notable stations available to Slovak listeners included the BBC World Service, Spanish State Radio, French State Radio, and the Western German Deutsche Welle and Deutschlandfunk. Radio Luxemburg played a role in introducing youth to the Western pop music boom of the late-1950s and 1960s.