

„Target ALFA“

Czechoslovak Security Services against Radio Free Europe

Within a few years after the end of the Second World War, Europe had been divided. East-European democrats who escaped to the West wanted to break the isolation of people of the Soviet bloc countries and create conditions for the restoration of freedom and democracy. In 1949, after a number of meetings between the representatives of Czechoslovak exiles and American politicians, a non-governmental National Committee for Radio Free Europe was formally established in the USA. The most well-known activity of this Committee was associated with the broadcasting station Radio Free Europe (RFE, or in Czech, RSE – Rádio Svobodná Evropa).

The prime objective of the National Committee for Radio Free Europe was to provide assistance for the exile representatives in their efforts to set free those countries which were ruled by communists, trying to create for exiles the opportunity to address inhabitants “at home”, and also to convey the experience of American democracy to them. This first assignment continuously changed over the course of time, and RFE became independent of exiles, who were not united and who projected their various particular interests into the activities of RFE.

Radio Free Europe was founded in late 1949, with the editor’s offices at first based in New York and Munich. Pilot half-hour broadcasting was effected on 4 July 1950, and officially it was put in operation on 1 May 1951 when “the Voice of Free Czechoslovakia” was heard across the ether for the first time. Subsequently this was followed by broadcasting to the people of Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and a few years later also for Albania. On 1 March 1953, Radio Liberation (later Radio Freedom) launched its activities, broadcasting to the Soviet Union nations.

In 1952 RFE obtained, for almost forty years, its seat in a complex of buildings of the English Garden in Munich, Germany. In 1976, RFE and RS were united into a single organization. Until 1972, RFE had been financed by the USA Congress via the CIA, and then the Congress rebuilt the system of financing, to be transparent and controllable. The relationship

between the exiles and the broadcasting station Radio Free Europe changed over the course of time. Nevertheless, RFE remained the most persistent and the most conspicuous enemy of the communist regimes within Eastern Europe.

The purpose of this study is to provide as precise and as detailed information as possible about the operations of the former Czechoslovak communist regime against the broadcasting station Radio Free Europe between 1951 and 1990, drawn in particular from the archival sources of the Czech Republic.

Further, the author wanted to compare the plans of Czechoslovak security institutions to silence RFE with available knowledge about the actual outcomes of those plans. Concrete examples illustrate a number of generally valid facts about the activities, methods and results of the Czechoslovak regime's struggle against the exiles.

However, the point is not the coverage of the history of Radio Free Europe, nor the history of its Czechoslovak editorial staff. Because it is particularly the archives of the former Czechoslovak communist regime that were the main source of information, especially the archives of the State Security (StB) Intelligence Service or the archives of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic.

A substantial part of the information acquired and contained therein is published for the first time. Based on certain theoretical texts compiled by the StB, Radio Free Europe is characterised herein as "the subject of StB attention". Theoretically, also concrete means used by the Czechoslovak Security Services are presented. The study deals with the development of StB structures (particularly those of the Intelligence Service) which focused their attention on Radio Free Europe, and introduces a number of StB members involved in activities directed against RFE. In addition, a description is given of the complex system of the file agenda and categories of StB collaborators— Counter-Intelligence Service and Intelligence Service.

The largest portion of this study is taken up by a description and analysis of the State Security plans of action against RFE, as well as by the characteristic of particular operations and careers of secret collaborators. This part of the text is subdivided according to particular periods determined by key historical events.

In view of international political development enabling more extensive contact between the Czechoslovak domestic and foreign opposition since the 1970s, the study also

depicts the activities of the Counter-Intelligence Service of the State Security fighting against the internal enemy. Especially in the 1980s it focused on the punishment of active listeners reacting to Radio Free Europe broadcasting in writing or by phone.

In its activities against Radio Free Europe, the State Security cooperated, of course, with partners from the security services of other Soviet bloc countries. In particular operations aimed at returns which were publicized in the media, no matter whether these were “voluntary returns” or obvious kidnaps, were a serious form of activities against RFE and against exiles. Rather considerable efforts to influence the existence of RFE through diplomatic negotiations were less successful and not numerous.

RFE activity was not confined only to broadcasting over the radio. Especially in the 1950s, attempts were made to disseminate information by mail, or by air, using balloons. Also here the state power applied its tools.

The conclusion of this study deals with an attempt to assess whether the activities of the Czechoslovak security apparatus of the communist regime directed against the broadcasting station Radio Free Europe were successful. The Annexes testify that the Czechoslovak communist Intelligence Service produced information and disinformation as well, offering an example of theoretical coverage of the issue of managing agents within RFE, a document relating to the background of a bomb attack launched against RFE in 1981, and unique photographs from the Intelligence Service archives.

The Annexes include an index supplemented with the code names of persons and operations, as well as a list of relevant literature, a list of sources and more than 400 extensive commentary notes.

The primary message of the submitted publication is the ascertained fact that the Czechoslovak communist regime, in spite of making an enormous effort and using a variety of (quite dubious) tools, failed to reach any considerable or permanent success in its fight against Radio Free Europe.

In spite of that fact (or precisely for that reason), this hitherto unclear chapter about the contest between totality and freedom certainly deserves further study and explanations.

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