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Blinken Open Society Archives | Hoover Archives Research Assistance Scholarship

Final Report

Project Summary

This award of the Blinken OSA's Hoover Archives Research Assistance Scholarship was made in support of my MA thesis project entitled *Human Rights Radios? Radio Free Europe, the BBC External Services and the "Helsinki Process", 1973-1978*, which was successfully defended in June 2018. My work compares the reaction of Radio Free Europe and the BBC's External Services to the negotiation and signing of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 by member states of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), examining the similarities and differences between these two key international broadcasting institutions' responses to the Conference, the signing of the Final Act, and the so-called "Helsinki Process" which emerged from 1975 by which the language of human rights took on a new prominence within the discourse of Cold War diplomacy in Europe. The aim of this work is to demonstrate that between the opening of the initial negotiations of the CSCE in 1973 and the closing of the first CSCE follow-up conference in Belgrade in March 1978, both RFE and the BBC CED, in different but related ways, underwent a transformation in the way in which they represented and justified their mission and purpose which was closely related to the ideas about freedom of information which were formulated within the so-called "Third Basket" of the Helsinki Final Act, pertaining to "Humanitarian and Other Fields".

Using archival sources from both RFE and the BBCXS's collections, I argue that despite the existence of real differences between the two organizations in relation to their origins, locations, and perceptions of themselves in relation to the other, by the end of my period both organizations had evolved into "human rights radios", an identity which continues to dominate their external and internal representations of their work to this day. Despite the major differences which existed between the two, both RFE and the BBC CED developed a new emphasis on serving the human rights of their listeners during the period between 1973 and 1978 that had not existed in the same way before. This emphasis on human rights remains an important part of both organizations' missions and reputations to this day. It is my contention that during this period, both RFE and the BBCXS fully embraced new identities as "Human Rights Radios".

Methodological Approach and Initial Exploration of Hoover Institution Archives' RFE/RL Collections

This thesis relied heavily on primary source material which was made accessible via the OSA's Hoover Archives Research Assistant Scholarship, which made it possible for me to hire Vera Czernichowska to undertake 40 hours of research assistant work, which was spent taking photographs of key folders within the Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Broadcast and Corporate Records Collections, housed at the Hoover Institution Archives. After initially undertaking a keyword search using the Hoover Institution's searchable online archival catalogue, I was able to narrow down my focus to a series of likely locations for material relating to my key research questions relating to this material, which were as follows:

- 1. In what ways did RFE respond to the emergence of the Helsinki Process in the period 1973-1978?**
- 2. In what ways did the nature of these institutional or individual responses within Radio Free Europe change or evolve over the period 1973-78?**
- 3. Are there discernible differences between RFE's Polish, Hungarian and Czech language services' policies or stances on the Helsinki process?**
- 4. What were the similarities and differences between RFE and the BBC's internal responses towards the Helsinki Process during the period 1973-78, and what was the nature of the relationship between the two organizations?**

These research questions directed me towards a range of materials regarding RFE's specific responses and interaction with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Program Policy Guidelines, Guidance Summaries and Program Schedules for the period 1973-1978 for each of the Hungarian, Polish and Czechoslovak Broadcast Desks, Audience Research Reports covering Eastern European opinions on the Helsinki Final Act and RFE's coverage of human rights initiatives in Eastern Europe, and interactions with the BBC External Services during my period. This material was spread over a range of different subfunds, including the Public Affairs Office File, 1950-1995; Alphabetical File, 1948-1988; Office of the President File, 1951-1995; Historical File; Audience Research Office Files, 1958-1990. With the guidance of my research assistance Ms. Czernichowska, who was able to make a brief assessment on the relevance of files to my particular research questions on the basis of a quick sort of requested materials, I was able

to prioritize materials which explicitly referred to the Helsinki Final Act and the subsequent impact that the Act had upon human rights activism within Central and Eastern Europe.

Application of Hoover Institution Material within Thesis

Having undergone this initial review process, my final work explicitly utilized material from the following folders in particular to cultivate my overall argument regarding Radio Free Europe's "pivot to Helsinki" between 1973 and 1978:

HISTORICAL FILE:

1675.5, BBC, Includes correspondence on the "poaching" of programs

This folder, containing correspondence between acting Director of RFE Chester W. Ott and Head of the BBC Central European Service George Tarjan, was used to demonstrate the simultaneously close yet competitive relationship between RFE and the BBC, particularly with regards to both organizations' efforts to protect their staff from being "poached" by the other.

163.6, Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Material used from this folder included a "Talking Paper for Belgrade", dated May 13th, 1977 produced by RFE's sister station Radio Liberty in preparation for the Belgrade follow-up conference of the CSCE, demonstrating the extent and nature of the organization's preparation for this key event.

163.7, Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Belgrade 1977

I relied particularly heavily on material from this folder to demonstrate how seriously RFE considered the possibility of being threatened with forced closure as a result of attacks on its legality at the Belgrade CSCE follow-up conference, and how it prepared in close consultation with the US Department of State to fight off any potential attacks on this basis, justifying its continued operation with explicit regard to the provision of the Helsinki Final Act on the exchange of information.

1675.9, Broadcast Analysis Department, General, 1973-4

This material on Original Airtime Figures, demonstrating the proportion of RFE airtime devoted to different kinds of programming (news, music, sports, cultural programming etc.) was used to demonstrate how RFE cultivated a holistic programming offering to its audiences, of which broadcasts which explicitly focused on Helsinki- or Human Rights-related issues were only a small part.

Findings

In combination with the further archival research I undertook at the Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest (Records of the Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Research Institute) and the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham, UK (BBC External Service Collection), I was able to reach a number of conclusions on the nature of both RFE and the BBC's responses to the emergence of a new prominence for the language and ideas of human rights during the time of the negotiation, signing, and early years of implementation of the Helsinki Final Act. My completed work shows evidence of how both RFE and the BBCXS shifted towards increasingly deploying the language of human rights in defining themselves, and in justifying their continued existence, to a range of audiences. This suggests that such representations gained a new prominence, and were considered to be newly persuasive and powerful, during my period of study. Moreover, I was able to conclude that this shift towards self-identifying as "Human Rights Radios" was coherent in relation to their respective governments' more general shifts towards the deployment of human rights-based arguments in order to further their foreign policy goals.

Conclusions and Further Possible Uses of Hoover Institution Material

Material relating to RFE's explicit references to the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act during the US State Department's preparations for the CSCE follow-up conference at Belgrade between October 1977 and March 1978 was particularly valuable in making my comparative case with the BBCXS, for whom no such explicit "pivot to Helsinki" is demonstrated within their archives but which nonetheless underwent a comparable shift towards deploying the language of human rights to justify and explain their work.

Many of the documents which were photographed and collected on my behalf which I was unable to utilize in the course of my MA thesis work may be fruitfully utilized in future possible articles or studies on the relationship between Radio Free Europe and the prominence of human rights arguments within Cold War diplomacy from the 1970s onwards. One area of particular interest is the existence of material which focuses on how the legacy of Helsinki was evaluated and assessed within RFE in 1985, ten years after the signing of the Final Act. It is my intention to re-assess all of the material collected that has not yet been used to evaluate the possibilities of using such material to strengthen and extend my claims about the transformation of RFE during the latter half of the Cold War and beyond into an organization for whom claims about serving

its audiences' human rights relating to freedom of information became increasingly central and definitive with regards to its overall purpose and mission.

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