

Visegrad Fellowship at the Open Societies Archives
Recipient Final Report
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Project title: The Ambivalent Empire. Soviet Rule in Uzbekistan, 1945-1964

Introduction

This report summarises my work and its results during my research stay as a Visegrad Fellow. As the title of my research project suggests, my research is concerned with the study of centre-periphery relations in the Soviet Union. Generally speaking I am interested in the tension arising from the Soviet nationality policy that created and sustained nations in the Central Asian heartland. Set against the background of enormous economic, industrial and socio-economic change ushered in by the Second World War the project analyses how the central Soviet government, the Uzbek republican political elite as well as the Uzbek population bargained over the meaning and goals of Soviet rule within three specific sectors: the economic, the political and the socio-cultural. As a consequence, the project sheds new light on the late Stalinist period in Central Asia and the developments during Khrushchev's tenure that changed both the centre-periphery relations as well as Central Asians' relationship with the state. The outcome of the project is a monograph.

Research at Open Society Archives

My work at the OSA had two specific goals: first, it aimed at achieving an overview of the general developments within the Central Asian region. Second, I wanted to become better acquainted with the discussions on domestic concerns in the Soviet Union.

Serving these objectives, I have mainly worked with the sources of the Soviet Red Archives Old Code Subject files (HU OSA 300-80-1) of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute. This is a comprehensive inventory with large sections section on the Central Asian region, which includes topics such as political changes, agricultural and industrial development as well as cultural matters. Furthermore, several Soviet Red Archive materials are ordered thematically under headlines such as Stalin and Stalinism, which I have used as a means to assess developments in Central Asia from the perspective of the centre of power.

The holdings I have worked with consist primarily of two kinds of sources: for the largest part, they consist for the largest part of newspaper clippings from Russian language newspapers such as Pravda, Pravda vostoka and Izvestia but the holdings entail too a considerable amount of foreign language (German, French, English) clippings. The second major part of the files consists of country analyses, researched and compiled by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty researchers.

Apart from the work with the archival materials of RFE/RL, I have devoted a my attention to the excellent newspaper and journal collection housed by the OSA and the library facilities at the CEU. Hence, I have worked with the newspapers Komsomol'skaya pravda and Pravda vostoka as well as the journals Bol'shevik and Kommunist that, despite incomplete runs, have a notable presence at the OSA.

Research Findings

The review of the documents reveals a wealth of information concerning the general political trends and developments of the Soviet centre-periphery relations. Despite the ideologically tainted discourse in the official sources, one is able to discern several issues leading to tensions between the central leaders in Moscow and the peripheral leaders in Tashkent and, more broadly, Central Asia. This includes particularly elite exchange, which contributes to a better understanding of the political issues at stake, and the documents thus cast light on the patrimonial relations between the centre and the periphery. This only partially becomes evident from the official news outlets but the RFE/RL background/country reports back up these findings with excellent estimations of the underlying reasons for political repression and centralisation and the report provide valuable information too on discussions concerning, for example, the Soviet nationality policy. These were issues heavily debated as part of the centre-periphery relations not only by high-ranking politicians but also scholars of various republics, as becomes evident through the study of the journals Bol'shevik and Kommunist.

The Soviet Red Archive holdings also shed light on the socio-dynamic development of Central Asia. Accordingly, the inventories hold ample information on questions related to cultural affairs, economic progress as well as agricultural and industrial development. Despite the bias of official sources toward either a devastating critique of the modernisation within certain socio-economic areas (e.g. religion) or an (often)

unwarranted celebration of economic achievements, the sources give a good indication of the issues at stake on the lower levels in the Central Asian heartlands.

Research results and outcomes

Although the materials at the OSA are predominantly official sources, the stay at the OSA has, on the one hand, shed light on the themes that followed from the centre-periphery relations and, on the other hand, allowed me to gain a better understanding of the general issues and trends during the period 1945-1964. This will be particularly important for my upcoming research stays in Russia and Uzbekistan as it allows me to better determine which holdings and sources are relevant to my research.

Furthermore, particularly the clippings from the RFE/RL have made possible to easily establish timelines and gather biographical information, which normally is a tedious puzzle. This is valuable information that allows me to develop a better sense not only of the personal and patrimonial relations between the centre and the periphery but also regarding the political clans holding sway in Central Asia. Moreover, these findings will crucially assist the final research I need to conduct before finalizing my book manuscript.

In addition to serving as background research, my stay at OSA has also had several positive side effects. Through the structure and source compilations at the OSA I have easily gained access to sources concerned with other Central Asian countries and Soviet republics. As a consequence of this comparative basis, I have been better able to access the uniqueness of Uzbek and Central Asian developments. This has sparked several ideas for future research especially regarding comparative research and I am currently working on a research article that will be based on some of these findings. Moreover, the research stay at OSA and my findings there have allowed me also to develop new ideas, on which I have been conducting preliminary research. This has included work in the library, particularly of the Central European University, which has offered a unique opportunity combine theoretical and archival work.

Conclusion

Through the support of the Visegrad Fellowship I have not only been able to conduct archival research crucial to my book project but also had the opportunity to fruitfully engage with both other Visegrad Fellows as well as the academic community in Budapest. Although the majority of the material I worked with at the OSA belongs to

the category of public materials, the OSAs vast holdings and the work conducted by RFE/RL researchers and archivists facilitated my research tremendously. All in all the data I collected has thus been of great value for my project and serves as a good basis for my future research trips to Russian and Central Asian archives.

The stay in Budapest also allowed me to get acquainted with and integrated in an very vibrant and inspiring research community at the OSA and at the CEU. As a result I have been able to establish new contacts and work on new topics, which I would otherwise have had only scarce access to. One of the unexpected corollary effects was my having the opportunity to produce an analysis of the current political state and elections in Hungary due to appear in a national Danish newspaper prior to the elections in April.

I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the staff of the OSA, who have made my stay an extraordinarily positive experience. Through deepening conversations with my mentor Olga Zaslavskaya, I learned about the important inventories; Katalin Gadoros ensured a smooth arrival and always provided assistance when needed; lastly, the archivists and reading room staff, especially Robert Parnica and Ors Tari, often went out of their way to accommodate my requests and ensure excellent working conditions.