

CHAPTER I

The coordinates of the Archives

The enemy-archives*

The topsoil of the earth, the matter we live on, is but decomposing residue, decaying matter, a fossil record. The present is thus a parasite on (almost) dead traces of the past under our feet. This is how Darwin, in *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms* (written in 1881), perceived and described the basis of our present world. There is an archive beneath us; and in order to understand ourselves, our lineage and the directions we are coming from and heading to, we should simply look for the remains of the dead, for the decomposing archive. The key is beneath us. (Decoding and understanding is as simple as this. Or at least, this is how Darwin imagined the consequence of the work of the diligent worms.)

The Open Society Archives (OSA) is beneath my feet, two levels under the ground, on floors minus-1 and minus-2 in one of the buildings of the Central European University. It is a subterranean institution. The core collection of the Archives, the documents and records accumulated by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty are the residue of the Cold War, remnants of the longest propaganda war in modern history. The documents in part were produced and collected in order to aid and cover a large covert operation of the agencies that stood behind, and at the same time helped, the work of the Radios.

The holdings of the Open Society Archives are both smaller and more extensive than the Radios' original archive. Not everything came to Budapest from Munich and New York when, after the end of the Cold War – when the Radios had fulfilled their original mandate and made themselves obsolete – the US Congress decided to downsize the operation and cut the budget. The final destination of the “Corporate Archive” – the administrative documents, the correspondence between the Radios and the different offices of the American government, as well as the directives sent to the Radios – was the Hoover Archive at Stanford. OSA does not have – in fact does not even know much about – the still-classified, partly CIA documents, which could testify about “one of the [CIA's] most successful covert operations” as a well-informed insider addressed the Radios retrospectively. (Marchetti and Marks, 1974 pp. 134–135)

The core of the collection under the ground in Budapest is a typical product of the Cold War period: it does not directly reveal much about the organization that produced the documents, but one can learn much inferentially by studying the materials the Radios and the agencies behind them had collected and stored.

The programs, or “production tapes” the different desks of the Radios had produced did not come to OSA, but instead remained for the time being at the Radios, which moved to Prague in 1995. A large number of the copies of the Polish and

* The expression comes from *The Imperial Archive* by Thomas Richards

Hungarian radio programs were later donated to Polish and Hungarian national archives, and a plan to copy the Russian language programs and donate the copies to an institution in Russia has not yet been abandoned. The destination of the transcripts of the so-called “monitoring tapes”, however, was Budapest.

Besides collecting clippings from Central and Eastern European official newspapers, diplomatic post reports, interviews with refugees from the region, descriptions by tourists and sensitive and clandestine information with the help of different intelligence agencies, the Radios closely followed the events in the so-called “target countries” by listening to and recording the official radio broadcasts coming through the air from the communist world. The broadcasts were then transcribed during the night, and by the time the programs resumed in the early morning, the transcripts were already on the tables of the people in charge of the political and ideological direction of the programs. The Radios immediately reacted to the news coming from behind the iron curtain, where, at the same time, agents working for the other side, for the communist jamming/monitoring stations, listened attentively to the broadcasts of the “enemy stations” like Radio Vatican, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and, later, Radio Tel-Aviv, Radio Tirana, Radio Peking and others as well.

Monitoring the “enemy broadcasts” was made difficult by the political need to jam the very same programs at the same time. Jamming took either the form of transmitting a continuous noise on the same frequency as the “enemy station”, or broadcasting a mixture of speech, music, and atmospheric noise designed to overwhelm the incoming broadcast. According to the one-time director of the Hungarian secret jamming agency, right before 1956, each day 218 hours of enemy broadcasting trespassed the Hungarian airwaves on 214 frequencies. The jamming agency, with the modest code-name “Post Office No. 118”, did not have the capacity to jam all incoming programs, and even if it had possessed the necessary technical means, it would not have been allowed to do so, as a consequence of the need to monitor the enemy broadcasts. (*Cf. Révész, 1996*) During the night, while the transcribers worked at RFE/RL, scribes were busy transcribing the recorded programs of the enemy stations inside secret offices in the communist countries. The transcripts were delivered in due time to desks in the ministries of interior, the offices of the secret police and the propaganda and agitation department of the party headquarters. Orders and directives were sent in turn to the official media including the radio stations: how to respond to the propaganda of the enemy.

Visiting the archives of the national news agencies of the former communist countries or the (mostly still closed) archives of the former secret police, one would find the recorded or transcribed versions of those program tapes that did not come to Budapest with the core collection. OSA and these secret archives *together* form a full and peculiar picture of the way the Cold War, communism, the West, and the East were jointly fash-

ioned and produced by the enemy Radios and the national radios of the “target countries”. There was a constant, ongoing dialogue in the air with both sides reflecting on the recorded, transcribed and analyzed propaganda of the other. What the secret listeners, who tried to comprehend the broadcasts behind the constant curtain of noise perceived about their world, about communism, was in large part supplied by the descriptions they gathered from the “enemy radios”, RFE/RL being most prominent among them. RFE/RL conceived its programs largely as a response to the programs produced behind the iron curtain.

OSA acquired a few amateur tapes with records of RFE programs recorded inside the “target countries”, that preserved the noise of the jamming. Superimposed on the voices in the programs, covering the message, is the noise that was transmitted in order to neutralize, to eliminate and to erase all meaning. Instead of erasure, instead of an acoustic black hole, however, the result turned out to be noise as message, as meaningful information: “for despite the death it contains, noise carries the order in itself; it carries new information. This may seem strange. But noise does in fact create meaning: first because the interruption of a message signifies the interdiction of the transmitted meaning, and signifies censorship and rarity; second, because the very absence of meaning in pure noise or in the meaningless repetition of a message, by unchanneling auditory sensations, frees the listener’s imagination... The presence of noise makes sense and makes meaning. It makes possible the creation of a new order on another level of organization, or a new code in another network.” (Attali, 1985 p. 33)

The Open Society Archives houses millions pieces of carefully assembled information, obtained, collected and smuggled out in clandestine ways from countries with rulers who tried to hermetically seal them and isolate them from the other side, from the outside world. Most of the information stored underground, on levels minus-1 and minus-2 in Budapest, is blatant and obvious lies: forged election results, forged production statistics, forged birth and death rates, doctored maps and photographs and censored descriptions of events that never happened. Analysts at the Radios frantically searched for meaning behind the stereotypical *topoi*, trying to decode the allegedly coded messages, since it was difficult to imagine that anyone of sound mind – even in a completely boring totalitarian regime – would produce such unbelievable stories, news and information. But the cryptanalysis was in most cases done in vain: there was nothing behind the message; the message, as in the case of the noise, was the information itself.

Why would anybody come to an archives that has as its holdings mostly lies so detached from reality? What research, what solid knowledge can be based on such documents, on such a foundation? On May Day in the early 1950s, it is raining heavily outside: a worker, however, hears an announcement on the radio that the fine weather and bright sunshine will drive hundreds of thousands of workers to take part in the May Day

Rally. He is not surprised. He does not think that his eyes are deceiving him but knows that he is an eyewitness and an “ear-witness” to the superhuman confidence of the regime. He knows that what he sees from his window is true, and he is sure that he has grasped the words on the radio correctly. He is certain that there is a discrepancy between what his eyes and what his ears sense, but he understands that behind the truth and the lie there is something else: the message is not that the weather is fine and the sun is shining in spite of the hard rain, but that the Party feels confident enough to announce that rain is sunshine. The Party is stronger than the tangible world. Behind the lie there is the metatruth: the Party is able to announce whatever it wants to say, thinking that no-one will question the statement openly. *In mendacio veritas*, in lies there lies the truth.

Communism was built on, and eventually ruined by, such metatruths: on noises that warned the listeners that the jamming agency, the Party was there – even in the air, controlling not only the propaganda of the enemy but the eager listeners as well. Yes, the Party was there but paralyzed; capable only of making a cacophony in the air, merely creating the appearance of being there. If one wants to learn the truth about communism, the truth about the Cold War, the world of propaganda and appearances, and the most important reason for the Fall, an informed choice is to study this fake world, and the files and documents of which OSA is the guardian.

Not all the documents in the holdings of the Open Society Archives testify about paralysis and impotence: the Russian, Polish and Hungarian samizdat collections prove that there were some who questioned the lies, who chose not to remain silent, who under the dark sky had hopes even against hope. The Archives however houses documentation not only of individual dissent but of open resistance, the sometimes naive, romantic, but nevertheless heroic attempts: the Polish and Hungarian uprisings in 1956, Prague and Poland in 1968, the strikes along the Baltic coastline, Solidarity. The documents from the Fall, the peaceful revolutions, the transition, the End, which resulted in the Archives move from Munich and New York to Budapest, to the basement of the Central European University which is itself a product of the abrupt and unexpected changes.

OSA is not an archives frozen in time. It actively collects, solicits and acquires important collections and documents on the afterlife of communism and issues connected to human rights. This is why OSA houses the archives of *Index on Censorship*; this is why the records of the *UN Expert Commission* on war crimes on the territory of the former Yugoslavia found a place in the Open Society Archives; this is why the decision was made to continue the monitoring activities of the Radios and systematically record the nightly news programs of Serb, Croat, and Bosnian television during the war in Yugoslavia. OSA has a growing collection of new materials, but like the core collection of RFE/RL, most of the newly acquired documents testify about despicable acts, cruel-

ty, the breach of democratic rules of law and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other international humanitarian law. Ours is the archives of the enemy.

It is difficult for cultures to grasp the unspoken order which is the basis of their knowledges, as Foucault remarked. But “an enemy is an Archimedean point through which a culture articulates its unspoken structures of perception and thought. In this sense an enemy archive was and is an imaginary parallel universe through which a culture articulates its archive as a totality by producing representations of alien ideologies, nationalities and phenomena.” (Richards, 1993 p. 151) The enemy-archives is an institution where we can, and should, learn about ourselves.

The decaying residue which preoccupied Darwin in *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms* is not completely in the state of death. It is “in a median stage between life and death” like the Transylvanian noble Dracula in Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel: “Stoker’s Dracula forcibly undoes the assumptions of Darwinian morphology in the form of a creature capable of both sudden and lasting mutations of form. Stoker’s vampire lurks in these two blind alleys of Darwinism. He is the origin of his own species, a human being suddenly transformed into the progenitor of a terrifying new species.” (Richards, 1993 p. 60) We should be careful with decomposing residues, with the matter upon which we live, with fossil records. The traces are not completely dead – they can give life to mutants.

István Rév

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Old-fashioned cardboard transportable file containers from the RFE/RL Research Institute in Munich. Central office of the Open Society Archives.

Photo by Ferenc Nemzetes. Fonds 206 Records of the Open Society Archives.

Archival parasailing

As I write, parasailers are circling Mt. Saleve. Each of them has arrayed his kite, run to the edge of the cliff, and jumped off. The Open Society Archives was, at the beginning, archival parasailing.

Now, it is true that archives, at least in North America, are founded frequently. Colleges, businesses, religious bodies, and even municipalities all find themselves with an overburden of documents and a lack of management. Someone, somewhere says, “What we need is an archivist!” and another archives is created. Alternatively, of course, someone may say, “Let’s give this mess to Archives X” and that archives will take care of it.

It is no surprise that a person with a truffle-dog’s nose for history – as is true of both George Soros and Aryeh Neier, President of the Open Society Institute (OSI) – would begin to think about legacy. What is surprising, however, is that OSI apparently had not begun to think about the legacy of the Soros foundations network.

The Open Society Archives did not come into being in that way at all: instead of responding to piles of files and mounds of material in its offices in New York and Budapest, OSI began by contracting to take over the collection of the Research Institute of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which had fallen on very hard times. In addition, copies of records of the preparatory commission leading up to the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia were available. The leaders of OSI were intent on acquiring research resources for the new Central European University (CEU). What they also got in the deal was an archives and records management service for the Soros foundations network.

I remember a meeting at OSI in New York in the summer of 1995. Looking at a bookshelf, I asked whether OSI had a copy of every book published through an OSI grant. Amused, one of the staff members replied, “A copy? We don’t even know how many there are!” It was immediately apparent to me, as it would have been to any professional archivist, that the records being created by the Soros foundations were important: here was an agent of change in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the history of its activity would document the history of those countries, the history of the developing civil societies in the region, the history of the various disciplines funded by Soros, and the history of a unique experiment in philanthropy. Its records needed to be managed, and, most importantly, needed to be selected for permanent preservation in an archives. This meant that the Open Society Archives needed to become a records manager and archivist for the Soros foundations network while continuing to acquire materials from outside the network.

Any archives that both acquires records from inside this network and solicits material from outside must have a solicitation policy. I wrote one, and it was, with only

minor changes, accepted by the OSI Board. This allowed us to say “Thanks, but no” to potential donors or sellers while ensuring that we would be the archives of first choice for Soros organizations worldwide. We began to give records advice to Soros foundations in various countries, with the hope that they would eventually send their older records to the Archives in Budapest. As independent organizations, these foundations could not be required to send records, but we tried to be friendly and encourage them to do so.

And so the venture was launched. We hired and trained staff, created a schematic description of the holdings in accordance with international archival standards, and launched a website. We had the luxury of building a temperature- and humidity-controlled storage facility and Research Room, with the unfailing assistance of Bernie Stollman of the Soros organization, and the architect, Michael Cojocar. We moved into the new facilities at CEU during the early summer of 1997, abandoning our historic mansion and the not-so-historic warehouse on the outskirts of the city. We started to hold exhibitions and to develop training courses, first for our staff, next for the CEU Summer University, and then at the request of national Soros foundations.

We acquired additional material, and several acquisitions were especially important. Warned by people within the Soros foundations that the tapes of broadcasts of state television stations were in jeopardy or were actually being destroyed in Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, we contracted for off-air taping of all newscasts and other public affairs programs. Monthly shipments of videotape arrived from the three capitals, and we copied each tape and described them for research use. Eventually taping stopped in Zagreb, as word came that Croatia was now able to preserve its own television archives, and later taping stopped in Sarajevo. But it continued in Serbia to document for history the state’s pronouncements leading up to the war in Kosovo.

A second important addition was the donation of the records of the International Helsinki Federation (IHF). Contacts within the Open Society Institute put us in touch with IHF’s Executive Director, Aaron Rhodes, and one late afternoon he signed a deed of gift on behalf of the Federation. Staff members from the Archives went to Vienna and extracted documents from offices and, yes, bathrooms. The opening of the IHF records was marked by an exhibit, a symposium and a press conference, with the hope that other Helsinki organizations would also deposit their records.

The videotaping of the trials at the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague had been underwritten, in part, by the Soros organization. As a result, the Archives purchased a copy of the tapes of the first trial the Tribunal had held: an historical trial setting legal precedents for generations. These were used by professors and law students at Central European University almost as quickly as they came in the door.

Finally, we made an agreement with an extraordinary photographer, Edward Serrate, to obtain a copy of his photographs from the war in Bosnia. These are splendid images which will be a marvelous compliment to the videotapes of television broadcasts, the Helsinki records, and the materials from The Hague.

I was asked once, “Was the idea harder, or the implementation?” Neither, in truth. Once the decision to acquire the RFE/RL materials was made, what had to be done was obvious. What is difficult is maintenance: maintaining standards of service, continuing to give records management advice to the Soros foundations, and extending the networks of relationships with donors and potential donors, researchers and friends. It is that continuity, that maintenance of quality which is the key to the continued success of the Open Society Archives. It is a job worth doing – just like keeping a parasailer up in the air.

Trudy Huskamp Peterson

Passageway between the two wings of the former building of the Open Society Archives in Eötvös utca connecting the offices with guest rooms.

Photo by József Attila Balácsi. Fonds 206 Records of the Open Society Archives.



Access to archives: a political issue

The consequences of 1989

1989 closed a chapter in world history: the post-war period was over. In fact, this post-war period differed from all previous post-war periods of modern times. It was neither a peace like those which followed wars in the 19th century, nor a short, belligerent truce like the period of less than two decades which followed the conclusion of the peace treaty in Versailles. During the 44 years between the surrender of the Axis powers and the implosion of the Soviet imperial system, the world lived in a Manichean era, with tension and detente alternating. The Cold War, however, has not degenerated into a general armed confrontation – perhaps because the Second World War, the most horrible debauch of cruelty that has ever happened, served as a deterrent. The hostilities stopped in 1945, but a more or less dim souvenir of these years continued to haunt Europe.

By an innovation against diplomatic tradition, no peace treaty was concluded with Germany. Many questions generated by the war or the emergency decisions and measures following it remained unsettled. In fact, they are still open, although the main obstacle, the Manichean bloc system, was deconstructed between 1985 and 1991.

The 700 days between the opening of the Berlin wall and the coup in Moscow closed also the communist parenthesis and the age of the totalitarian state in the history of Europe. More than 20 countries found themselves faced with the gigantic challenge of inventing, engineering and managing the transition from monolithism to pluralism, from all-powerful party-state to democracy, from bureaucratic dirigism to market economies.

Relieved from the pressure of containment and the danger of confrontation in the West, released from a generalized deadlock in the East, European nations became aware that they had no free access to the knowledge of their pasts. Of course, the organized oblivion of painful or shameful past events in a democratic country like France or Switzerland differs radically from the organized lying and omnipresent secrecy practiced in the Soviet imperium. But it happened that the comfort of selective amnesia lost its attractiveness in the West at the very moment when 20 nations achieved the right to uncover their histories, long kept secret and distorted by compulsory lies. It is understandable that access to archives has become a hot issue attracting media attention in much of Europe.

The archival community reacted to this new situation by developing new working methods to address the problem of access. Historians, lawyers and administrators were associated with the necessary studies and, in order to highlight specific national schemes

both those favorable to the freedom of research and those which work to its detriment and to define realistic objectives, brainstorming round-tables involving two or more countries were organized. This effort, conducted by International Council on Archives (ICA), under the aegis of the Council of Europe, led to the development of a *Draft Recommendation on a European Policy on Access to Archives*. Agreement to various provisions by the Council of Europe is still outstanding, but hopefully the *Recommendation* will be formally approved next year. It is needed as a reference instrument in all countries, particularly in those where the democratization of access policies and the lifting of obsolete restrictions are under debate. (An almost final version of the text, dated February 1998, is available on the Open Society Archives' website.) The *Recommendation* outlines and explains the principles which should inspire legislation on access. It insists on the importance of coordinating such legislation with the laws concerning related areas, in particular with laws on access to information held by public authorities and laws on protected personal data. It also emphasizes that access to public archives is not merely a question of rules on disclosure and confidentiality, time limits, declassification, special permission to inspect restricted files and the availability of finding aids. It states that "However liberal the access rules prescribed in legislation may be, the actual communication of archives depends primarily on the facilities and on the human and financial resources which an archives service possesses for the preservation and the processing of its holdings."

The preliminary outline for a state-of-the-art review

Throughout the party-state parenthesis, in spite of a unified central command based in Moscow and a uniform phraseology, history did not stop. Each nation responded to commands in its own way, determined by its history, and the words imposed by the common speech-standard may have had different meanings in different countries. Access to archives was one of the non-uniformly handled areas, except for two rules: (i) records on political decision-making and on all operations connected with the control of the population by the party-state remained closed without time limit; and (ii) specific restrictions were imposed on foreign users.

When the parenthesis ended, the thirst for historical truth was equally strong everywhere in the region, but government authorities and archival institutions were not prepared to address the issue in a uniform way. Managing the transition was easier in those countries where archives had remained attached to a ministry of education or a ministry of culture, and thus could maintain a professional profile. Lifting restrictions which had become irrelevant required legal reform; there was no need to reshape the role of the archivist.

In countries where the archival field had been placed under or closely linked with the internal security authority, a much stronger tradition of secrecy had developed. Users had no access to detailed finding aids but instead received files selected for them by the archives staff, and no bundle or box was produced in a research room without being checked, page by page, by the staff. Through this double censorship, historians could be denied the right to inspect any record from any period of the past that did not corroborate the Vulgate, whether ideological or nationalist. In such situations, legal reform has to be accompanied by a reshaping of the professional practice.

In the new democracies, the starting positions on justified or unavoidable restrictions also differed from country to country for a wide range of reasons not necessarily tied with the distance between the archives and the STASI/Securitate-type police. Without attempting to be exhaustive, one can mention issues such as the country's relations with the Third Reich after 1938, the question of nationalities, conquest and repression during the party-state regime, and, in the former Soviet Republics, the degree to which the population identified with the USSR.

Following the years of change, practically everywhere the state archives system took over the archives of the communist parties, and these became accessible according to the same conditions which pertained to other public records. In Russia, however, after a brief general opening, the confidentiality of a number of government, Party, and Comintern holdings was reinstated under a new regulation on state secrets, without a specified time limit. Reopening is subject to formal declassification, even for records dating back to the 1920s and 30s.

Civil society and the media followed with particular intentness the fate of the internal security police files. For political reasons, and also due to financial considerations (processing these requires incomparably more manpower than is needed for normal government records), they were usually placed, following the German example, under the control of a special authority (e.g., in Hungary and in Romania). In other countries, they remained in the custody of the new police authority, a solution which UNESCO experts had warned against.¹

The European book market indicates clearly that the public wants to know what really happened since the appearance of the totalitarian state. People are passionately interested in their own histories and in those of their parents and grandparents. This demand may be satisfied if historians are given access to the sources according to sensible rules. The primary condition, however, as stated by the Council of Europe text, is seemingly more trivial: the records must be in archival custody. Partial information indicates that, while in some countries (Latvia and Slovakia, for instance) the archives possess

1. The report on Archives of Security Services of Former Repressive Regimes is available on UNESCO's website.

adequate storage capacity, in others a significant percentage of the records from after 1945 remains in the originating agencies due to a shortage of facilities (e.g. in Albania, Poland and Romania). A survey of the situation would probably be welcomed by the users, and it may also help the archives to obtain construction programs or resources for renting additional premises.

The transition continues

Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the revision of archival legislation and, more particularly, of access rules, is part of the democracy-building process. The rhythm and scope of reform have been contingent on political developments and economic circumstances. New archival legislation has been introduced in the majority of countries (including, among others, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Russia and Slovenia), but concepts and rules which lost their relevance with the change of regime were not systematically abandoned everywhere. Harmonization of the new legislation on archives with legislation in related areas has also started, but new problems constantly arise. *Aggiornamento* of legislation in the archival field is a permanent exercise; all new democracies are bound to care about improving their legal and regulatory texts in order to adapt them to the changing needs of the emerging information society.

According to a firmly established tradition, no archival legislation is drafted without extensive study of foreign laws and regulations, especially recent texts. Between 1971 and 1996, *Archivum* devoted seven volumes to publishing archival laws from all over the world (all in all 141 countries) to facilitate broad research by those developing legislative projects. The Internet now offers the possibility to respond to this need in a more dynamic way than conventional printing. OSA has already started to make archival laws and regulations available in the Regional Archives Support Project (RASP) section of its website. I am convinced that OSA would render an invaluable service to all partner countries and the archival community at large by continuing this activity and building up a database visitors could search on any issue covered by the texts: protection of personal data, declassification of restricted files, the status of municipal archives, agencies exempted from the transfer obligation, parent authority of the archives etc. For the first time, governments and archival authorities would have at their disposal a body of up-to-date information on possible options for orienting archival policies, and on the possible consequences of the options they may choose.²

2. A proposal of setting up such a database, developed three years ago by Dr. Lajos Körmendy of the Hungarian National Archives, has not been implemented.

The principle of assigning to the state the responsibility for preserving the national memory remains an unquestioned and unchallenged acquisition of modern times. This relatively new state function – previously records were to remain in the custody of the originating bodies forever – is not exercised uniformly, even in countries which are otherwise comparable. According to the pattern followed by the UK and the US, all government agencies transfer their records to a national archives fully responsible for their safe-keeping and for making available to users an undivided national memory. Under this pattern, the national archives have no control whatsoever over public records created at lower than central level of the administration and are not entitled to take into custody private papers and non-governmental archives.

The pattern developed by France 200 years ago gives diplomatic, military and police archives independence from the national archival authority, although the archival legislation is applicable to them. Under this pattern, a centrally controlled archival network serves the provincial/regional level of public administration, and state archives are entitled to acquire all kinds of private fonds and collections.

In fact, national situations are extremely varied, and features of the two patterns are mixed. In the age of electronic technologies and increased interest in recent history, the pattern which keeps the national memory undivided seems preferable. It permits a coherent, nationwide access policy covering paper and electronic records, strongly influenced by an authority which is the natural ally of scholars: the national archives.

A well-built, sufficiently rich and permanently updated database on archival legal and policy matters would also act as a powerful incentive to overcome the “Internet gap” still characterizing the profession. A well-developed internet infrastructure could also provide countless services to the archives of the region from distance training to the dissemination of statistical data, from individual or group consultations to on-line research.

The challenges described here deserve an ambitious response – a response which will serve the progress of archives in the new democracies.

Charles Kecskeméti

Wall clock from the 1910s that shows the “Certified Central European Time”. Central office of the Open Society Archives.

Photo by Ferenc Nemzetes. Fonds 206 Records of the Open Society Archives.



The Open Society Archives: a brief history

While the roots of the Open Society Archives (OSA) go back to the early Cold War, in its recent form the Archives is a creation of the post-Cold War, the post-communist period. It was established in 1995, in close relation to another new establishment, the Central European University (CEU). Both institutions represent a new era in the history of the region where the former activities of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) were focused. The new Archives acquires, preserves and makes available research resources in the areas of communism and the Cold War, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe in the postwar period; human rights issues and movements; and the activities of the Soros foundations network, including the Open Media Research Institute (OMRI, successor of the RFE/RL Research Institute) and CEU. The major part of the OSA holdings is the former archives of the RFE/RL Research Institute.

The collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe indicated that RFE/RL and its institutions in Munich had fulfilled their task, and the US Congress cut the Radios' funding. The question emerged: what would happen to the archives? Several options were discussed. The simplest suggested that the archives had lost its function, therefore its preservation was futile. This would have meant the total elimination of the files. Another option was that the various national records would be donated to the new democratic states, a move which would have led to the division of the materials – and possibly to their partial destruction. It would have also required that the governments be willing to accept and preserve the donated materials. Moreover, the division of the archives would have damaged its historical value. Although for many decades the archives had not functioned as a united division, eventually it became the unified product of an institution determined to carry out its very special mission. The archives could be deemed a unique product of a historical age; therefore, serious arguments supported the view that it had to be kept together and preserved as a whole. Finally, George Soros assumed the costs of maintaining, preserving and processing the former archives of the RFE/RL Research Institute for the next 50 years, and made it available to researchers.

The negotiations started in 1994. Under the custody agreement between the Open Society Institute (OSI), part of the Soros foundations network, and the US Congress in November 1994, the collection was to be shipped to Budapest.

The conditions of the transaction were clear: the RFE/RL archives had not been purchased by Soros, and it was to remain the property of the United States. The Open Society Institute had only assumed the financial and professional duty to preserve the documents and make them public for scholars, and literally anyone else who might be interested in them. At the same time OSI agreed to set up a new research unit in Prague – OMRI. The role of OMRI was similar to its predecessor in Munich: supporting the modified broadcasting and

programming activities of RFE/RL at its new location in the Parliament building of the former Czechoslovak Republic. RFE/RL continued its broadcasts, on a reduced level, to those sub-regions of the former Soviet sphere that were being destabilized by ethnic conflicts or falling under the control of new or transformed dictatorial regimes, usually of some religious or ethnic mutation: i.e. Russia, the Caucasus, the republics of the former Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria. In addition to supporting the Radios, OMRI also published a monthly periodical *Transition* that soon became one of the major English language sources for politicians, journalists and investors who were interested in the post-communist political development of Central and Eastern Europe. (OMRI supported the Radios until 1997, but remained the publisher of the periodical – later renamed *Transitions* – until May 1999.)

Thus, as a consequence of the custody agreement, two new institutions were born in 1995 – OSA in Budapest and OMRI in Prague – and the documents of the RFE/RL Research Institute had been divided between the two. However, this division was only functional and temporal. The so-called “historical files” of the original archives (the documents older than five years) were sent to OSA, while the “current files” went to OMRI. Each year the documents that had supposedly lost their current value were collected and shipped from Prague to Budapest. (After OMRI closed its operation, the remainder of the former RFE/RL files, as well as the files accumulated by OMRI from 1995 to 1997, ended up in Budapest by 1997.)

The historical part of the RFE/RL archives started to move to Budapest from Munich in the spring of 1995. The amount of material carried in dozens of enormous trucks was amazing. The archives in Munich had collected, processed and preserved one of the largest collections of Polish and Russian samizdat materials in the world, and contained books and almost all possible types of printed, self-copied and handwritten materials. The archives had accumulated a huge collection of complete runs of periodicals from throughout the region including regional dailies. The archives was the only place in the region where, for example, the confidential files of the US State Department on the Soviet Union were available to researchers. The library of the RFE/RL Research Institute consisted of more than 130,000 volumes, monographs, essay collections on and from the region, samizdat publications, emigrant literature and political pulp-fiction from the Cold War era.

The archives had to be transported from the RFE/RL headquarters and several warehouses in the suburbs of Munich. Within two months, this huge amount of records, books and other printed materials – more than 2,500 linear meters – arrived in Budapest. The most important parts of it were deposited in OSA’s first main building in Eötvös Street. However, it soon became clear that the preliminary estimate of the quantity of records arriving in Budapest was not even roughly accurate. Moreover, the trucks stuffed with hundreds of cardboard boxes and filing cabinets arrived without catalogs or any approximate descriptions of their actual content. Because the archival procedures at

RFE/RL had not been systematic for many years, and fundamental changes had taken place during its 45 years of operation, from the “input perspective” in Budapest it often seemed that even the archivists in Munich did not have a clear picture of the quantity, types and locations of the materials the RFE/RL archives had amassed.

Yet the destination in Budapest, due to the unexpected haste and urgency, was not in a much better condition either. The first site of the Open Society Archives in Budapest was an old palace on the edge of downtown Budapest. The building, once the residence of a grand merchant family, then owned by the famous aristocratic family, the Podmaniczky, was confiscated in 1945 and donated to the National Trade Union of Iron Workers (Vasas Szakszervezet – the union’s sports club, Vasas SC, was the favorite of János Kádár, chief secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party from 1956 to 1988) and served as headquarters, café and club for privileged trade union functionaries. Thus the spirit of the space was not far from the historical aura of the records soon to be deposited and stored there after the collapse of the regime. However, the building was completely vacant when OSA’s first small team – a historian, a technician, and a secretary – took control of it. There were no furnishings, no shelves, no computers – just two chairs and some old telephones. When early on it became obvious that there was not enough space in this building for all the records that were underway from Munich, it became an urgent necessity to rent a remote warehouse in the suburbs. The book warehouse of a retailer in Kén Street served as a perfect temporary solution.

The processing and arrangement of the records started immediately upon their arrival, and this work went on parallel with the technical furnishing of the Archives itself. The schedule was pressing, since the archives wanted to open its doors to researchers by the beginning of the academic year.

Early on, the number of staff was very limited. The first circle of staff was primarily recruited from among young CEU historians. They were native speakers of the languages of the various national records included in the RFE/RL holdings, and their main fields were contemporary, post-war European history, and the history of communism and the Cold War. Each curator began to process the records relating to a particular country. Their first step was to identify and separate the various types of series, and to recover or re-establish a preliminary order for those records that were damaged or lost during shipment; at the same time, the initial versions of inventories were to be prepared. The technical staff still consisted of only one member who carried out most of the technical and installation work within the Archives. The academic and scholarly activities of OSA were elaborated and shaped by Professor István Rév of the CEU History Department, who was elected as Academic Director by the joint Executive Board of CEU and OMRI in May 1995.

The Archives started receiving researchers on an experimental basis on 11 October 1995, yet the success of the initial period was only partial. Although many parts of the

records (perhaps the most important parts) could be made public in time for the opening, 75 percent of the materials still had not been even touched. It became clear that the palace on Eötvös Street, though a quiet and attractive place, was not suitable for managing and controlling the huge OSA collection, which had already grown with the acquisition of records from other sources. By the summer of 1995, OSA holdings had been enriched by donations from the International Human Rights Law Institute in Chicago and the London-based periodical *Index on Censorship*. And further acquisitions were expected. Both the final location and the matters of human resources urgently called for a satisfactory long-term solution.

The establishment of the new archives entered a new phase in the fall of 1995. At the end of August, Trudy Huskamp Peterson, former Acting Archivist of the United States, had joined OSA as Executive Director. Between October 1995 and January 1996, the size of the staff doubled. Professional archivists were invited from all over the world from South Africa to the US and Europe. Systematic processing had started, including the design and preparation of a new electronic database and archival location register. The project included the records deposited temporarily in the Kén Street warehouse – enormous amounts of printed materials and documents from the early period of the Munich archives that were, for the most part, still in a quite disorganized and unexplored state. After several months of exhaustive work OSA celebrated its official opening on 15 March 1996, the anniversary of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and, incidentally, Free Press Day. The ceremony was thus a symbolic reference to the history and original mission of RFE/RL and its archives. Gábor Demszky, the Mayor of Budapest delivered the opening speech. On this occasion Demszky, who in the early 80s was the founder of the largest samizdat publishing house in Hungary, also donated to OSA his private samizdat collection – the records, reminiscences, and relics of his clandestine activities.

By this time OSA had begun preparations for the move to its new permanent site. The first drafts of the new storage area were sketched in January 1996. The site was to be constructed among the buildings of CEU's downtown complex. The construction started in 1996, utilizing a huge three-level storage area, which had been partially built under CEU. The new premises were equipped with the best available shelving and storage technology. The archives moved to the new space in the spring of 1997, while its Research Room only had to be closed for three weeks due to the move. Now the Archives' Research Room, which opened on 3 May 1997, is located adjacent to the CEU Library. The new location turned out to be much better not only in the practical and archival but also in an intellectual sense. Now that the Archives is within CEU, it serves mainly, but certainly not exclusively, CEU's faculty and students, who come from the very same region and have the most in common with the holdings and history of this archives.

As already indicated, the holdings of the Open Society Archives are not limited to the history of communism and the Cold War. In July 1995, one of the most important

proponents of human rights and free press, the world-famous London periodical *Index on Censorship*, donated to OSA its archive of documents and manuscripts from the 60s through the 80s. The first shipment arrived in August 1995, and the fonds is supplemented and updated on a yearly basis.

Similarly, the documents of the International Human Rights Law Institution on the war crimes and human rights violations committed in the former Yugoslavia arrived to OSA in August 1995. The Institution, commissioned by the United Nations and based in Chicago, formed a research team led by Professor Cherif Bassiouni which systematically collected and processed information about the crimes, mass destruction and other violations committed during the civil war in Yugoslavia. This work was sponsored by George Soros. The fonds contains news clippings, headlines, reports and confessions as well as a large audio-visual collection from the period 1992–1995.

The records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) also belong to the holdings of OSA. The the first national Helsinki Committee founded in 1976 in Moscow to monitor the fulfillment and execution of those resolutions of the Helsinki Treaty that prescribed general human rights principles with which the signatories must comply. The IHF, the federation of the national committees, became one of the most influential organizations in the 80s. It firmly criticized the human rights violations and intolerable practices of the socialist states, and actively supported human rights and opposition movements within the Soviet bloc. The records of the IHF arrived at OSA in April 1998. In addition to the files of the central office in Vienna, the Archives also receives the records of its local member organizations, the Helsinki Committees from within the region.

As previously mentioned, OSA received the collection of Gábor Demszky, Mayor of Budapest in addition to the samizdat files arriving from Munich. Demszky was the founder and director of the AB Independent Publishing House, which issued and distributed periodicals (*Hírmondó* and *Beszélő*) and clandestine literature from the region and from the West. The Demszky files contain periodicals, books, manuscripts, printing sheets and galley proofs. Researchers can follow all the phases of production; moreover, with the tools and machines Demszky donated it would be possible to produce samizdat even now.

The Archives actively takes part in organizing and supporting historical research on the communist period. OSA sponsored videotaped interviews with the founders and leaders of RFE/RL. The research and the interviews were prepared by Black Box Videoperiodical Foundation, the first independent media company established in Hungary in the late 80s. OSA also sponsored Miklós Kun, Hungarian historian who conducted interviews with former Soviet party-leaders and members of the apparatus. The resulting series, consisting of more than 100 hours of videotape, was deposited in the

Archives. Also the private film and photograph collection of Péter Forgách, the world-famous Hungarian director of documentary films, is available at OSA.

Finally, OSA continuously receives files from organizations in the Soros foundations network.

András Mink



Typewriter, used for producing samizdat materials, operated by Anna Wagner, the first employee of AB Independent Publishing House, Hungary.

Photo by Andr s R v sz. Fonds 302 Samizdat Publications of G bor Demszky, OSA.