CHAPTER IV

Cooperation

The Open Society Archives (OSA) is not a reclusive institution. Its goals are broader than simply acquiring, preserving and making available documents, or exhibiting them for the public; they include cooperation with other archives and related institutions, especially in the former communist countries, and supporting projects which aim at preserving documents and making them accessible to researchers. They also include giving professional help, providing forums for exchanging information and ideas as well as sharing the specific knowledge and experience of Archives staff, and contributing to formal and informal archival education.

In other words, OSA's ambition is to provide an information gateway between East and West; to help researchers from outside of the Central and Eastern European region find archival sources in countries of the region, to help archivists establish professional contacts in OSA's main areas of activity, and to provide relevant professional information for archivists in the former communist countries and from the rest of the world.

OSA is convinced that through these various forms of cooperation it can actively contribute to the development of archival and information legislation in the countries of the region, as well as to the formulation of an information policy based on democratic principles.

These were the main reasons why the Archives established the Regional Archival Support Project (RASP) and its successor, the Regional Archival Cooperation Project ("YEAST") which provide a framework for the various cooperative and support activities in the above areas.

The following section provides an overview of the most important projects, events and activities involving cooperation between OSA and its partners.

Regional Archival Information Center

An important element of RASP was an online service for the archival community, RASP Online, which constituted a part of the OSA website. It included regularly updated information about recent and upcoming events, descriptions of archival courses and distance-learning possibilities, and a collection of links to relevant websites. Important pieces of legislation related to information policy and archival regulation, both from countries of the region and elsewhere, as well as the texts of basic international archival standards were also posted on the pages of RASP Online. A special service of RASP Online was the Archives-East Listserv which provided a free online discussion forum on archival issues of the region for participants, regardless of their geographic location.

The renewed Regional Archival Cooperation Project ("YEAST") is also emphasizing the exchange of information using the ever-increasing possibilities of the Internet. One of the central elements of its Internet-based *Regional Archival Information Center*

is an information base on archives and the archival situation in countries of the region. A questionnaire has been sent to several leading archival organizations in the region in order to receive up-to-date information relating to the main categories of archives; the hierarchy among the different categories and levels of archival institutions; the archives specializing in the history of communism and the Cold War and/or human rights issues; the most important laws and regulations in the archival field; the most important archival publications, archival programs and projects; regular archival events; and contact information including websites and mailing lists. The questionnaire has also been distributed at seminars held at OSA, and the information received is being processed for eventual posting on the OSA website.

International conferences organized by the Open Society Archives in Budapest

In addition to organizing public lectures and events, OSA regularly hosts conferences, seminars and other forums for discussion especially for members of the international archival community.

An outstanding event of this kind was the meeting of archivists from former Yugoslav countries hosted by OSA in Budapest on 12–13 July, 1996. This event was the first face-to-face conversation of national archivists from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Yugoslavia since the old Yugoslav Federation split apart. The Secretary General and the Chair of the Coordinating Board for European Programme of the International Council on Archives (ICA), as well as representatives of UNESCO and the Council of Europe were present and took part in the discussions. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the records necessary for the functioning of the new governments, the records of the political history of the republics, as well as their former records remained in the National Archives in Belgrade. The main issues raised at the meeting were as follows: a survey of all federal records; the publication of a list of accessions to archives since the split; the provision of copies of vital documents, guarantees of free access to documents for government purposes; the inclusion of a consultation and consent period for all states in the destruction schedules for federal records, and the initiation of direct cooperation among archivists on archival issues.

On 23–24 August, 1996, an international seminar was hosted by OSA in cooperation with the International Association of Sound Archives (IASA), the International Council on Archives and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) on *Descriptive Standards for Sound Archives*. As a result of the joint seminar, the representatives of these three international non-governmental organizations confirmed that, although the underlying principles and the basic blocks of description of sound recordings appear to be similar, the three traditions represented at the seminar

approach the practice of description in different ways. Moreover, each NGO has already completed a great deal of work to standardize practice. Therefore, a *Recommendation* and an *Action Plan* were drawn up by the participants in order to foster a convergence of standards and practices of description, building on the common elements of the three traditions, which would be of considerable mutual benefit to both professional archivists and the users of archives.

In connection with the meeting of the Programme Management Commission of the International Council on Archives (ICA/CPM) held at Central European University, *The Electronic Record and the Changing Workplace – Colloquium on Archives and Records Management in the Electronic Age* was held in the CEU Auditorium on 7 December, 1996. Opened by Wang Gang, President of ICA, the colloquium provided an opportunity for the leaders of the international archival community to participate in an exchange of information and ideas related to electronic records and "re-engineering" of archival institutions.

In March 1999, OSA hosted the annual research workshop of the International Team of InterPARES (International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems), led by Luciana Duranti, Professor at the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia, and President of the Society of American Archivists. The InterPARES Project is a major international research initiative in which academics, national archival institutions, and private industry representatives collaborate in order to develop the theoretical and methodological background for the permanent preservation of authentic records created in electronic systems[35].

On 12–13 March, in connection with the workshop, OSA organized the *Open Archival Forum* on archival automation for archivists and computer experts from countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The forum provided an opportunity for the participants to introduce and discuss archival automation systems, software developments, plans, and practices. OSA wishes to foster the development of commonly used standards and practices in archives of the region; to help standardize concepts, terminology, and methodology; and to help create a common, standardized archival database in Central and Eastern Europe. As part of the forum, the members of the InterPARES International Team presented a short seminar on the status of research on long-term preservation of electronic records.

A two-day seminar and workshop for Soros foundations network staff was held at OSA in Budapest on 25–26 March, 1999. The purpose of the event was to discuss records management and archival issues concerning the records of the national Soros foundations. An important issue discussed by the 20 participants from 13 foundation offices was the possi-

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35.   See <www.interpares.org>.

ble closure of some Soros foundation offices in the near future. OSA plans to establish standard procedures for dealing with older and current documents before the offices close.

In addition, the seminar and workshop can be considered the first step in establishing a network-wide comprehensive *records management manual* to assist each Soros foundation in properly managing its records, and to be used as a model in setting up records retention schedules in each foundation. It can also assist the foundation offices to establish proper document management procedures and transfer historic materials to OSA for permanent retention.

Conferences organized by the Open Society Archives in foreign countries

Responding to the requests of archives and other organizations from various countries of the region, OSA has organized a series of seminars and conferences in former communist countries.

In June 1997, two members of the Board of the Soros Foundation – Kazakhstan visited OSA and requested assistance with reforming archival law and practice in Kazakhstan. After a visit by OSA's Executive Director to Kazakhstan, and based on discussions with key individuals in the archival field, a joint project was developed in cooperation with the Foundation.

The Kazakhstan project consisted of a series of three seminars held in Almaty. The first four-day seminar was organized in January 1998 under the title *Access to Government Information;* the guest lecturers were Trudy Huskamp Peterson, then Executive Director of OSA, Claes Gränström, Deputy General of the National Archives of Sweden, and Iván Székely, then Chief Counsellor of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, Hungary. The issues discussed included the examination of the principles for archives and current records legislation prepared by the ICA, the examination of various models of freedom of information and secrecy legislation, and the examination of privacy legislation, with an emphasis on the administration of the acts. The guest lecturers prepared several case studies in order to find solutions together with the Kazakh participants, and important pieces of legislation were translated into Russian and sent to participants prior to the seminar. An important aim of the seminar was to assist Kazakh legislators, government officials and archival experts in drafting the new Archives Act for Kazakhstan.

The second workshop was organized in April 1998 on the topic of the *international standards for archival description*. The leader of the workshop was Christine Nougaret, the chair of the ICA Committee on Descriptive Standards. The discussions included the examination of the General International Standard Archival Description [ISAD(G)] and the International Standard Archival Authority Records for Corporate Bodies, Persons

and Families [ISAAR(CPF)]. The participants viewed a demonstration of the application of description standards in an automated archival information system.

The objective of the third workshop, held in May 1999, was to develop a knowledge of *preservation management,* including disaster planning, and to offer a methodology for developing programs and priorities in this field. The guest lecturers were Helen Forde, Head of Preservation Services at the Public Record Office, UK, Josef Hanus, Head of Department of Archives Preservation, National Archives of the Slovak Republic, and Leszek Pudłowski, then Supervisory Archivist of OSA. Before the workshop, the students were given a questionnaire which they could use to help identify the preservation management needs in their own archives. Environmental control, disaster control, identification of vital records, and the preservation of audiovisual records were among the topics discussed.

On 4–5 June, 1998, OSA organized an international conference in Riga, in cooperation with Latvian partners, on the *records of the security services of former repressive regimes.* The participants included human rights lawyers, historians, archivists and victims of the former regimes from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The presentations and panel discussions focused on the analysis of the situation of the archives of the former repressive institutions in the Baltic States and Poland, the state of legislation, and the problems of preservation and accessibility. Topics relating to human rights were also discussed: the rights of victims, the rights of alleged perpetrators, the rights of third parties, and the right of access to public information. The necessity of creating a Code of Ethics for Archivists and the role of such a code were also among the subjects discussed. Prior to the conference, the UNESCO/ICA report *Archives of the Security Services of Former Repressive Regimes* was translated into Latvian and distributed to the participants.

Following the conference, a two week course on *Managing Current Records* was organized by OSA and the Soros Foundation – Latvia. More than 30 participants from Latvian archives and record-keeping institutions took part in the course, and outstanding international experts from the archival community were invited as guest lecturers. One of the outstanding lecturers was Eric Ketelaar, professor of archival science at the universities of Leiden and Amsterdam and Chair of the Programme Management Commission of the International Council on Archives.

Other forms of cooperation

Among all of its partner institutions, OSA has the closest relationship with the *Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.* This is not only because both are located in Budapest and both focus on the contemporary, post-war history of the region, it is also due to the crucial symbolic historical role that the 1956 Hungarian Revolution played in shaping the identity of RFE/RL.

Many of the Archives' public and scholarly programs would have been seriously hindered, or would have failed without the help of the 1956 Institute. The historians and archivists of the institute served as consultants to OSA in many cases, sharing ideas and lending important resources for its exhibitions. In addition, OSA has had the chance to participate in some major international events organized by the 1956 Institute, such as the international conference *New Archival Evidence* in 1996. In January 1999, the two institutions held a joint exhibition about the post-1989 historiography of the revolution.

The *Institute of Contemporary History,* established in 1989 in Prague, is an interdisciplinary research center focusing on the historical period from the beginning of the Second World War until the present. As part of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, the Institute aims to fill the gaps, both in academia and in public knowledge, which have been left by totalitarian distortions of the past. OSA and the Institute cooperate by exchanging information on research activities; OSA provides copies of documents from its holdings to the Institute for research purposes.

OSA is taking part in the Russian archival education project established within the framework of the *Archival Training Center (ATC)* affiliated with the European University in St. Petersburg by actively shaping its curriculum and sending guest lecturers to its courses, especially experts in information policy, data protection, and access to information legislation. The Archives has also offered to cover the costs of some Russian-speaking archivists from former communist countries of the region who will participate in the Center's courses.

Recognizing that accessibility of retrospective information plays a major role in the political, economic, social, and cultural development of Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet Union, and that most of the archivists in Russia (especially in St. Petersburg and the northwestern region of the country) have no historical and archival education, the ATC has been established in cooperation with the Open Society Institute in Moscow as a branch of the OSI-Russia Archival Support Program planned for 1999–2000. OSA already organizes a series of Summer University courses for archivists at Central European University in Budapest for archivists, especially from the former communist countries and considers it important to strengthen archival education in the countries of the region, and seeks to share its professional knowledge with archivists in Russia and other Central and Eastern European countries.

OSA holds the status of Associate Institution in the *International Committee for the Computerization of the Komintern Archives* (INKOMKA), in which the Directorate of Archives of France, the Federal Archives of Germany, the Ministry for Education and Culture of Spain, the Swiss Federal Archives, and the Library of Congress are partner organizations. The project is based on the Framework Agreement between the State Archival Service of Russia (later Federal Archival Service of Russia – Rosarkhiv) and ICA,

signed in June 1996. The Russian Centre for Preservation and Study of Modern History Records, on behalf of the Russian parties, guaranteed the integrity of the Komintern Archives and provided for the creation of a database and digitized copies of the documents. The Centre also developed the methodological documentation concerning the implementation of the project and established the rules for providing free access to the database and the digitized copies of the documents for all researchers, irrespective of their citizenship. The ICA supplied the Centre with the Russian version of the software used in the Archivo General de Indias (the archives relating to the discovery of America), and provided the delivery, installation and technical support for the necessary equipment as approved by INKOMKA. As reported at the fourth meeting of INKOMKA held in Moscow on 15–16 March, 1999, altogether 63,248 files were processed and 246,528 images were digitized, comprising 12 to 33 percent of the documents selected for processing. The project, supported by the Council of Europe, will likely continue in the following years and is expected to produce 50–60,000 new records in the database and 120–150,000 images per scanning station each year.

Beside the above mentioned projects and activities, OSA regularly receives visitors from the international archival community, and Archives staff participate in national and international archival events and pay visits to partner organizations. The Director of the Section of Archivistics and Record Management of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic visited OSA in 1998, and in the same year the Archives received a representative of the Society of Archivists of Croatia. The Director General of the National Archives of Hungary visited OSA in 1999. A Russian archival delegation headed by Vladimir Eremchenko, Deputy Head of the Federal Archival Service of Russia and Chairman of the Central Records Appraisal Commission, visited OSA in Spring 1999. The members of the delegation had discussions with senior OSA experts about possible joint projects and asked for professional support in describing archival materials, and in creating finding aids for the Russian archival network. Natalia Tomilina, Director of the Russian State Archive of Most Recent History (RSAMRH; formerly the Storage Center for Contemporary Documentation), visited OSA in May 1999. During her visit she gave a lecture on the holdings of RSAMRH and proposed to publish a book on "destalinization" on the basis of documents held by OSA and RSAMRH.

The German Historical Museum, in cooperation with the International Association for Media and History (IAMHIST), organized an international conference on *The Media and Political Change in Europe* in September 1999 in Berlin. Csaba Szilágyi, an Archivist at OSA, presented his paper *What Do We, RFE/RL, Talk About When We Talk About the Romanian Events of December 1989?* based on an analysis of the Romanian records (Subject Files and Monitoring Files), RFE/RL publications, and OSA Library holdings. This not only provided the opportunity to share the results of detailed research on OSA materials

with a large scholarly audience, but it also called the attention of historians, media professionals and other possible researchers to further OSA resources yet to be exploited. In addition, the conference laid the path for potential cooperation between OSA and other organizations interested in the relationship between history and the media.

As a unique action in an emergency situation, OSA sent 4,000 archival boxes to Poland in the summer of 1997 in order to assist with repairing the damage caused by the worst flooding in Polish history. Professor Daria Nałęncz, Director of the General Office of State Archives of Poland, had asked for the international archival community's help in diminishing the losses. In the southern and western regions of Poland about four kilometers of records were flooded by polluted water in public and private archives, and OSA sent a shipment of boxes suitable for storing the material which could be salvaged.

Cooperation with civil organizations

The Open Society Archives has established special relationships with several civil organizations which have as their mission the collection and preservation of documents related to the recent past and the opening of files to ensure the public's right of access to information and documents.

Memorial is one of OSA's most important partners in the civil sector. This organization is a movement arising from the years of perestroika with the main task of awakening and preserving society's memory of the severe political persecution in Soviet Unions's recent past. It is also a community of dozens of organizations in different regions of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Latvia and Georgia. Memorial maintains both a museum and a repository of documents, as well as a number of specialized libraries[36].

In several cases OSA has requested and received photos, copies of documents, and books relating to famous Soviet dissidents, while colleagues from the archives of Memorial have requested copies of samizdat publications from OSA's holdings of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty material.

Memorial contributed to the Archives' *Gulag* exhibition (see Chapter III) by sending scanned images of documents, comments and autobiographies of famous Gulag prisoners. For the same exhibition, OSA translated the Memorial's questionnaire for collecting data from former prisoners, their family members and their acquaintances, and made it available for visitors to the exhibition. Organizations of former Hungarian Gulag prisoners also received the questionnaire. The content of the completed questionnaires will be translated into Russian and sent to Memorial in order to enhance its database on persons who suffered from political repression and the deprivation of freedom.

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36.   For more details, see <www.memo.ru>

The *National Security Archive* (NSArchive) is an independent non-governmental research institute and library located at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. The Archive collects and publishes declassified documents acquired through the US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). NSArchive is also a public inter-est law firm defending and expanding public access to government information through the FOIA, and it indexes and publishes these documents in books, on microfiche and in electronic formats[37]. Founded in 1985 by a group of journalists and scholars, NSArchive has become the world's largest non-governmental library of declassified documents. OSA has already received copies of a number of declassified documents from the collection of NSArchive. Since many documents describing the activities of US secret services relating to the covert operating of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty are still classified, it would be desirable for the OSA to establish cooperation with both the CIA and NSArchive in order to facilitate the declassification of those materials which have already lost their operational character and are now of historical value. During a seminar on Cold War doc-uments organized by NSArchive in Washington in the summer of 1999, Natasha Zanegina, Senior Archivist at OSA, held discussions with staff members of NSArchive and made important steps toward establishing this potential cooperation.

Citizens' Watch, a St. Petersburg-based, non-governmental human rights organiza-tion formed in 1992 by a group of human rights activists, lawyers, and members of the Russian parliament, primarily attempts to assist in establishing parliamentary and civic control over governmental agencies, such as security services, armed forces, and the police.[38] Since 1998, Citizens' Watch has concentrated its efforts in three important fields of the new Russian legislation: access to information, protection of personal data, and the rights of servicemen. In December 1998, Iván Székely, Counsellor of OSA, gave a pre-sentation entitled *Access to Information, Access to Documents* at the international seminar *Freedom of Information: Standards of a Democratic Society,* organized by Citizens' Watch. There he consulted with Russian archivists on the legal and practical aspects of different models of access to information of public interest. In February 1999, Székely participat-ed in another Citizens' Watch international conference held in St. Petersburg, *Privacy in the Era of Contemporary Information Technologies.* There Székely presented the paper *Principles, Dangers and the Legislative Solution. Technology against Technology.* Both papers were translated into Russian and published by the organizers.

The founders of the Bulgarian organization *Access to Information Programme* (AIP), established in 1996 are journalists, human rights lawyers, sociologists and econ-omists. Their main goals are to encourage individual and public demand for informa-

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37.   See <www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv>

38.   Further information about Citizens' Watch can be found at <www.wplus.net/pp/citwatch>

tion through civic education, to fight for greater transparency in government, to provide legal help for subjects of information refusal cases, as well as to encourage freedom of information legislation by reporting on legal and practical solutions from different countries, by organizing workshops and seminars, and by submitting recommendations to governmental and legislative agencies. Iván Székely was an invited lecturer at the international conference *Access to Information – The International Standards and the Bulgarian Legislation,* in December 1998 in Sofia organized jointly by AIP, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, and the non-governmental organization Article 19. The conference was supported by the Open Society Foundation Sofia and the Council of Europe. He introduced the theoretical background and the legal and practical implications of the Hungarian model of openness and secrecy legislation. In September 1999, Székely was also invited as a lecturer and consultant to a roundtable with lawmakers, followed by a conference for the general public, jointly organized by AIP and the Bulgarian Media Coalition in Sofia. Both events were intended to improve the draft bill on freedom of information, and coincided with the first reading of the draft in the Bulgarian Parliament.

In April 1999 the newly established *Association "Memorial of the 1989 Revolution in Timisoara"* contacted OSA and requested professional help in establishing a collection of documents relating to the 1989 Romanian Revolution. Their mission is to keep the memory of the Revolution in Timisoara alive, and to purchase, acquire, collect and exchange historical documents of all types in connection with these events. The holdings of the planned archives of the Association include manuscripts (testimonies of eyewitnesses), oral history recordings, and collections of publications and scanned images. OSA has offered professional archival assistance in setting up the Association's archives, and the two organizations have exchanged information about their holdings concerning the Romanian Revolution.

The Recovering Identity Program

One of the tragic lessons of the conflict in Kosovo is that in modern wars it has become possible to expel masses of people while systematically stripping them of all proof of their identity, thus making it difficult or impossible for them to return. Similarly, centralized and computerized population registers, real estate registers and other databases concerning large numbers of citizens provide technical possibilities for deleting or manipulating citizens' identities and personal data.

Without documents or other proof of identity it becomes almost impossible to gain access to the most basic and essential services of a modern society, especially those associated with the rights of citizenship.

At the end of any war it is essential to ensure the safe return of refugees. In most cases this requires international cooperation. One of the basic conditions of refugee return is proof of the identities of refugees, and, if no such proof exists, the formal restoration of refugees' identities.

The Recovering Identity Program was established by a number of international organizations to ensure that, wherever possible, such destruction of identity would be reversible, both in Kosovo and in future conflicts.

On 1 July 1999, a coalition of international organizations including representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Civil Emergency Planning Division of NATO, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Medicins Sans Frontieres, the Forced Migration Projects of the Open Society Institute, the US Department of State, the International Foundation for Election Systems, the Open Society Archives and other organizations met in Budapest to discuss coordination of the Recovering Identity Program. As a result of this meeting a series of specific recommendations has been made toward the establishment of international rules to protect and/or re-establish the identity and property rights of refugees.

Blace, Macedonia, April 1999. A family driven out of Gnjilane arrives at the refugee camp in Blace after several days of being on the run. Displayed at the exhibit *Ten Years After* (Galeria Centralis, June – July 1999). Photo by Szabolcs Dudás. Fonds 206 Records of the Open Society Archives.

To this end, through the Recovering Identity Program the Open Society Archives provides a consortium of international agencies with secondary sources of verification, from OSA's collection efforts, for refugees' identities. These secondary sources of identification include such varied materials as census surveys and telephone directories. In addition, OSA offers ongoing support services for international agencies involved in the identification of refugees, and – using its significant expertise in dealing with openness and secrecy, informational rights and data protection – has proposed basic principles for the handling of personal data of refugees.

The draft DNA Recommendation

As we learned from events in the Kosovo conflict, organizations dealing with refugees register people as they arrive in camps, and generally record data and issue temporary identification cards on the basis of the refugees' own testimony. Apart from the questionable reliability of data recorded in this way (the memory of shocked, elderly people can be at fault, while others may even intentionally report false data) the data collected may not be identical to information in central registries, or may be unacceptable as proof of identity to the authorities.

In such cases, as a last resort, it might be necessary to establish the genetic relationship among family members as a means of recovering identity. The technologies required for such tests are generally well established, in some cases routinely applied, and their reliability has been scientifically proven.

A mass application of these technologies has been necessitated by the Bosnian war, where genetic identification is used by the organization *Physicians for Human Rights* to identify victims buried in mass graves, and to prove their relationship with surviving family members. This organization has worked out the technology of these tests, and has developed a so-called "antemortem database" to help identify missing persons.

With the living, the task is somewhat different: a single given sample need not be matched against many, but against one or a few. In such tests, nuclear DNA, which is cheaper and easier to look at than the mitochondrial DNA used in forensic samples, can be used. The technology applied is readily available and can be used while the costs of such tests are moderate. These facts ensure the feasibility of using this method of testing to help restore the identity of refugees deprived of their documents.

However, the use of genetic information relating to identifiable individuals requires special safeguards. History has shown that centralized lists of personal data can be used to great harm, as well as to great benefit. Genetic data, such as data on racial or ethnic origin, might provide the basis for discrimination and social stigmatization, as well as the resources for genocide or a new series of deportations if history were to take an unfortunate turn.

Therefore, a generally accepted recommendation and a set of basic principles to be followed by all who participate in recovering peoples' identity are needed to serve as guidelines for such procedures if they are adopted.

OSA has therefore worked out a draft *Principles and Recommendations* based on existing international documents in order to help recover the identity of present and future refugees by applying modern technology with necessary safeguards to avoid harm, and ensuring full respect of the informational rights of the people concerned.

(The full text of the draft of *Principles and Recommendations* can be found in the Appendix)

Managing the records of the Soros foundations network

About Records Management

There is little doubt that our society is much more information-dependent than previous societies – in fashionably saying, we live in an "information society". During the second half of the twentieth century, due largely to the technological development, the quantity of both publicly available and organizationally-private information has grown exponentially. The variety of media and the forms of information has increased, as has the number of information producers and providers. Information has become our basic resource and our basic product, and it has to be managed properly to be useful.

One might get the feeling that coping with the information explosion is mostly about volume. The vision of the paperless office has not been realized, and it may never be, but how electronic information is being managed is still an issue. In addition, there are the problems of controlling access to information, government control, and freedom of information, as well as the unresolved problems of copyright and security.

Along with the changes mentioned above, there has also been a change in the perception of the function of records management. While in the past records management mostly meant dealing with paper records, nowadays the profession is considered as a part of information management. The definition of records management has been radically broadened: it is the discipline of organizing and maintaining records[39] to ensure that they are kept as long as required for business purposes and for any sanctioned secondary pur-

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39. "Record may be defined as any information captured in reproducible form that is required for conducting business." (Penn, I.A., Pennix, G., Coulson, J.: *Records Management Handbook*, London: Gower, 1994. p. 3). It can be also defined as "… recorded information, in any form, including data in computer systems, created and received and maintained by an organization or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs and kept as evidence of such activity" (*Standards Australia,* 1996, pt. 1, p. 7, 4.21)

pose. However, records management issues also include the consideration of legal requirements for keeping records as well as any legal and ethical restraints on making the records available. Information professionals such as archivists and records managers work together to assess records for continuing value through a process called a records survey. They then "timetable" the records for eventual disposal, using a document known as a retention schedule. Records are either destroyed at the end of a specified period or transferred to archival custody. A records manager can assist organizations by helping to incorporate the record-keeping requirements defined in the records schedules into business procedures, practices and systems.

Records with continuing value to the Soros foundations network

The *Archival Policy of the Soros foundations network* recently approved (June 1999) by its International Strategic Board provides a general framework for the individual records management projects launched by organizations in the Soros foundations network. The Open Society Archives not only has a coordinating role in the development of these projects, but as the official archives of the network it assumes responsibility for preserving non-current records that are no longer needed for the regular activities of the foundations and which have been identified as having continuing value. These records are referred to as "permanent records". Although OSA can provide optimum storage conditions for the permanent records of the network, it also encourages Soros organizations to establish their own archives and preserve records possessing sufficient historical value in their own countries. The reason behind the strategy dividing permanent records of the Soros foundations network into two categories – records to be transferred to OSA and records to be kept in the country – is that certain records created by Soros organizations are part of the national heritage of their countries.

Soros foundations started their activity before, during or after the collapse of the communist regime, and their mission is to promote civil societies and to support the development of new democratic institutions in the transitional period in Central and Eastern Europe. The Soros Foundation Hungary, established in 1984 was the first foundation in the region funded by George Soros, and it is one of the oldest private, independent foundations in the region. Soros foundations have been established in more than countries of the world; and in addition, the Open Society Institute, Budapest and the Open Society Institute, New York administer "network programs", which function on a regional or network-wide basis. It is difficult to measure how much the foundations have contributed to the transformation of closed societies into open societies; however, it is possible to say that these organizations have done much to support or directly sponsor programs in education, law and arts, and in other areas such as

disseminating information. Sometimes simple things were enough to cause irreversible changes: recognizing that access to information is one of the keys to an open society, Soros foundations purchased xerox machines – photocopying was not permitted in many communist countries without bureaucratic procedures – and distributed them to all kinds of institutions.

Although the life-span of the Soros foundations network will be relatively short, it has existed during a period when most of the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe were undergoing a deep and intense economic and political trans-formation. One day the records of the Soros foundations network will provide a unique and rich resource for scholars writing the history of the transition in the region. Whether the right kind of information is saved for the future, and how this information will be accessible, now depends on the judgement of thorough records managers and archivists. Entrusted with making these decisions in cooperation with the foundations, the Archives believes the constant reappraisal of the network's records will lead to the identification of permanent records that can only be understood in their own context. Hence, OSA is also convinced that certain records of the individual Soros foundations, of the network programs and of the international initiatives, are more valuable to the corporate memory of the network than to that of the national foundations, and as such, they have a place at OSA.

Records management services to the Soros foundations network

The Records Management Program of the Open Society Archives was established to assist the organizations of the Soros foundations network. The Program is based on the information management strategy which says that information is a unique resource for the organization producing it, and it should be managed in such a way that it be useful and accessible in the present and in the future. The Records Management Program includes services intended to help Soros network staff in all locations to create effective and efficient systems for the management of records and information. The aim is to ensure that proprietary records of the network are accessible when and where they are needed. Knowing the latest developments in information technology, OSA encourages the Soros organizations to pay special attention to the management of electronic records. In the implementation process, OSA is working to secure the permanent records of the Soros foundations network worldwide. The advisory service of the Records Management Program includes:

•   Advice, assistance and training in the implementation of the records management program of the Soros foundations network;

• The preparation of appraisal reports for the development of retention schedules to provide for the authorized, systematic and economical disposal of all kinds of temporary records at the Soros organizations;

• Information and advice regarding filing procedures, equipment and storage facilities;

• Storage, preservation and retrieval of non-current records with continuing value to make possible their permanent retention and use at the OSA;

• Regular off-site visits to monitor the implementation of record keeping procedures at the Soros organizations.