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REFERENCE INFORMATION PAPERS

# The 1956 Hungarian Revolution

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# **The 1956 Hungarian Revolution**

Reference Information Paper 4:  
The 1956 Hungarian Revolution  
Compiled by András Mink, September 1996  
Revised by Csaba Szilágyi *et al.*, September 2001  
Cover design and layout by Iván Székely  
Open Society Archives at Central European University

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**OPEN SOCIETY ARCHIVES** (OSA), established in 1995 by George Soros, is an independent international archival institution affiliated with the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. OSA obtains, preserves and makes available to public research resources in three main areas: the history of communism and cold war, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe; human rights issues and movements with particular emphasis on the second half of the twentieth century; and the philanthropic activities of the Soros foundations network and the activity of the Central European University.

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**REFERENCE INFORMATION PAPERS** (RIP), compiled by staff archivists, are thematic finding aids aiming to guide researchers to all the relevant archival materials at OSA that relate to a certain topic. Issues of the RIP series are published irregularly, and always reflect the *status quo* of the holdings. The catalogue entries indicate the exact fonds reference, date span, approximate quantity, and, occasionally, medium of the records.

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## Introduction

*By István Rév, Director, Open Society Archives*

Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that beside the collapse of communism – that is, the ultimate aim of the work done by Radio Free Europe (RFE) – the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was the main event in the history of RFE. For a few days it seemed that the transitory life of communism was over, that the agreement allegedly reached in Yalta among the great powers did not have a binding force – at least the West would not take it seriously –, and in the light of the Revolution, the mission of the Radios, both in hindsight and with an eye to the future, would be historically justified. During the days of the fighting, all 29 transmitting stations of the Radios worked round the clock. For the first time, the Radios had correspondents working behind the Iron Curtain. In one sense, what occurred can be seen as the earliest example of a modern media news event, when the working of a media organization was able to shape those very events that it was covering.

The 1956 materials in the Open Society Archives (the archives of the Research Institute of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) are unique. The Archives holds transcripts of those RFE programs which reflect both the events as well as the reactions to the local coverage of those events, along with transcripts of local radio station programs that reacted and responded to the programs of RFE. The documents give voice to this strange dialogue, and illustrate how this correspondence in the air shaped the events covered by the different radios at different locations.

The Revolution played an unusual role in the life of the Radios in another way: it forced a major review of the Radios' broadcasting. Accusations about the Radios' influence on the Revolution were published – not only in Hungary and in the Soviet-Union but even in Germany, Austria, Sweden, and in the United States – in the immediate aftermath of the events. Following the publication of these articles both the US Congress and the government of the Federal Republic of Germany initiated an investigation about the role of the Hungarian Desk during the revolutionary events. The main thrust of the accusation was that the Radio played a role in the military campaigns; this was founded on the alleged fact that the Radios reported the coming of military help, namely, the coming of the US and/or UN troops.

In response to these accusations, the Radios conducted extensive audience opinion polls among both members of the refugee community and persons still in Hungary, and initiated an internal investigation. This was the first serious test of the role the electronic media could play in shaping important events. From this angle, the Archives' holdings on 1956 have much broader significance than just documenting the extraordinary events in a Communist country. (Looking back, one can argue that the "liberation policy" or "liberation rhetoric" of certain Western governments – as a consequence of which the Hungarian public had real grounds to expect foreign military help –, together with the lack of any serious military help during the Revolution, greatly contributed to the surprisingly quick consolidation of the post-Revolutionary communist restoration. The public understood that communism was there to stay, that Yalta should be taken seriously, and that communist rule would not be just a passing episode in history.) The Open Society Archives holds all the important documents of these investigations, together with a high number of private letters to the Radios that both praise and criticize the work of RFE during the Revolution.

In the Archives there are unique and important interviews conducted during and immediately following the events with participants of the Revolution, with refugees, with people from all parts of the Hungarian society concerning both the revolutionary occurrences, and about everyday life under communism. We have a special body of telegrams sent daily from Austrian refugee camps to the Radios' headquarters in Munich, reporting the changing situation as it unfolded, the rumors among the refugee community, and the first interviews with the exiles. What is especially interesting is not so much the factual accuracy of these reports, but the way in which Western journalists play up to the often peculiar expectations of the newly exiled Hungarians. From these reports it is possible to grasp how the West was perceived by these people who had been living behind the Iron Curtain.

The Open Society Archives is exceptionally rich in contemporary local papers, documents of the Revolution in the countryside, and transcripts of local, usually very short-lived radio programs. It is unusual that these are not exclusively Budapest-centered but cover different parts of the country, especially Western Hungary where the Revolution had a more immediate and important impact than in other parts of the country.

Analysts and broadcasters at the Hungarian Desk became almost obsessed, and understandably so, with the Revolution and its aftermath. Thanks to this unprecedented interest in the subject, their files contain clippings of almost all the important and less important articles published in relation to and about the Revolution up to the very termination of the Hungarian Desk in 1993. On file is every single mention of the Revolution in whatever context, both from the Hungarian and international press. These include transcripts of radio broadcasts in different languages, volumes of news items from dozens of countries regarding commemorations, remembrances, reminders or historical lessons drawn from these events in Hungary. The files contain valuable information about the post-Revolutionary trials, including court reports and lists and biographies of the victims. Based on these records it is possible to see, study and even write the history of communism – and not only of communism in Hungary – from the perspective of the aftermath of and reaction to the 1956 Revolution. I would even go as far as to say that it is difficult to write a realistic history of communism without consulting with these holdings.

The files contain important analyses about the reaction of the Western communist parties, the consequences of the Revolution and of the severe bruising taken by the international communist movement. The anniversaries and commemorations are also extensively covered in the materials. It is possible to observe not only the development of the Hungarian communist narrative but even the way the Western press came to terms with the events, and how the Western journalists tried to explain their growing sympathy to Kádár in the light of the memory of the Revolution. (“Hungary is the happiest barracks in the communist camp; they have their goulash communism; Kádár would be the only communist leader to be returned to office by a democratic election; despite the lack of Western help, the Revolution was a success (!); the sufferings were not in vain; Kádár became a liberal as a consequence of 1956; when we love him, we are not traitors of the memory of the heroic Revolution”). The materials are also an important source for those who are interested in the history of the East-West relationship during the different phases of the cold war.

The Archives inherited a rich body of documents produced by and related to the diverse group of Hungarian exiles, their struggles and activities, especially those, which relate to the Revolution, and their efforts to keep their memories alive. This contains all the important documents of the Hungarian opposition in connection to 1956. One can

see how the memory of the Revolution was initially suppressed and then trace its resurrection as an historical occurrence, the re-emergence of 1956 from the shadow of forced amnesia. The Archives has all the important samizdat documents published in connection to 1956, and materials about all the unofficial commemorations before 1989.

The archival materials naturally follow the fate of 1956 into the post-communist period. The interested researcher could make some telling and interesting observations about how the tone, evaluation, interpretation and assessments regarding the events have changed with the passage of time and change of leadership. What's more, these fickle scribes were sometimes the very same persons who played an active role in developing and maintaining the counter-revolutionary narrative. It is possible to follow the disintegration of the unified story of the Revolution as it was illegally remembered before 1989. 1989 was the date of the birth of several competing, sometimes exclusive interpretations of the Revolution, based partly on new recollections. New material that resurfaced after 1989 and that could serve as the basis of new interpretation is also stored in the holdings of the Open Society Archives.

The holdings at the Archives are broader than the original RFE collection was. The Archives succeeded in finding and attracting some important additions to the original core documentation, especially from the period of the post-Revolutionary restoration. The Archives is making efforts to build research resources about the communist representation of the Revolution after 1956, the ways the counter-Revolutionary interpretation has facilitated the communist historical and political narrative. The Archives continues to broaden the work of the people who worked at the Radios, and tries to expand the immensely valuable archives they assembled in difficult times.

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**HU OSA 300 Records of RFE/RL Research Institute*****HU OSA 300-8 Publications Department***

Much of these reports is duplicated in *HU OSA 300-40-1 Subject Files* and *HU OSA 300-40-12 Files of Aurél Bereznai*.

- Hungarian Situation Reports, 1959-1989, 0.50 Im
- Hungarian Background Reports, 1956-1989, 0.50 Im

***HU OSA 300-30 Czechoslovak Unit******HU OSA 300-30-2 Old Code Subject Files***

These are microfilmed Information Items.

- 2000 Morale and General Mood, 1956-1957, 0.01 Im

***HU OSA 300-40 Hungarian Unit******HU OSA 300-40-1 Subject Files***

- Amnesztia [Amnesty], 1948-1969, 0.06 Im
- Disszidálás [Defection], 1956-1959, 0.06 Im
- Emigráció: Általában [Emigration: General], 1955-1959, 0.03 Im
- Emigráció: Emigránsok hazlátogatása [Emigration: Home Visits of Emigrants], 1956-1963, 0.03 Im
- Emigrációs politikai szervezetek [Émigré Political Organizations], 1950-1989, 0.06 Im
- Emigrációs sajtó és -irodalom [Émigré Press and Literature], 1952-1969, 0.06 Im
- ENSZ: Magyar kérdés [UNO: Hungarian Issue], 1956-1970, 0.12 Im
- Külpolitika: Külkapcsolatok: Jugoszlávia [Foreign Affairs: Yugoslavia], 1956-1957, 0.05 Im
- Külpolitika: Külkapcsolatok: Lengyelország [Foreign Affairs: Poland], 1951-1958, 0.03 Im
- Külpolitika: Külkapcsolatok: Románia [Foreign Affairs: Romania], 1949-1958, 0.05 Im
- Külpolitika: Külkapcsolatok: Szovjetunió [Foreign Affairs: USSR], 1948-1958, 0.05 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom [1956 Revolution], 1956-1994, 1.62 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Írók lázadása: Petőfi-köri viták [1956 Revolution: Writers' Revolt: Debates in the Petőfi-circle], 1956-1957, 0.03 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Írószövetség [1956 Revolution: Writers Union], 1955-1966, 0.06 Im

- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Kiadóvállalatok [1956 Revolution: Publishing Houses], 1956-1956, 0.03 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Külföld a magyar írók érdekében: Disszidált magyar írók [1956 Revolution: Foreign Support for Hungarian Writers: Defected Hungarian Writers], 1957, 0.03 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Külföldi sajtó [1956 Revolution: Foreign Press], 1956, 0.09 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Special Monitoring, 1981, 0.03 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Nyugati sajtóban [1956 Revolution: Western Press], 1956-1976, 0.03 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Politikai perek [1956 Revolution: Political Trials], 1957-1959, 0.03 Im
- [Ötvenhatos] 56-os Forradalom: Újságírók [1956 Revolution: Journalists], 1958-1958, 0.03 Im

*HU OSA 300-40-2 Subject Files in English*

- Opposition: The 1956 Hungarian Revolution, 1966-1989, 0.12 Im

*HU OSA 300-40-4 Information Items*

- 106.1 Justice: Courts, 1952-1971, 0.03 Im
- 106.21 Justice: Amnesty, 1953-1967, 0.03 Im
- 106.24 Justice: Arrests, 1951-1972, 0.03 Im
- 130 Police and Security: General, 1952-1970, 0.03 Im
- 135 Police and Security: ÁVH [Államvédelmi Hatóság, State Security Authorities], 1955-1969, 0.03 Im
- 136 Police and Security: Persecution, 1952-1968, 0.03 Im
- 200.6 Armed Forces: Soviet Troops, 1952-1968, 0.03 Im
- 584.151 RFE [Radio Free Europe]: General, 1956-1957, 0.03 Im
- 812.2 Exile: Possibilities of Emigration, 1954-1969, 0.03 Im

*HU OSA 300-40-6 Biographical Files*

- Kádár János, 1956-1971, 0.15 Im
- Maléter Pál, 1956-1992, 0.03 Im
- Mindszenty József, 1948-1953, 0.37 Im
- Nagy Imre, 1953-1990, 0.62 Im

*HU OSA 300-40-7 Biographical Card Files of Individuals*

*Convicted for Political Reasons*

1956-1967, 0.32 Im

*HU OSA 300-40-8 Hungarian Monitoring*

These files include the program transcripts of the Hungarian Radio and also of independent local radio stations of ephemeral existence during the Revolution. RFE published these records in a 1986 publication (available in the OSA Library). Transcripts of the official commemoration programs on the anniversaries of the 1956 Revolution are also included in these files. Much of this material is duplicated in the Subject Files.

*HU OSA 300-40-12 Files of Aurél Bereznai*  
(under processing), 1952-1982, 2.50 lm

This body of records was created to support the work of a team of researchers within the Hungarian Unit who, under the guidance of Senior Research Analyst Aurél Bereznai worked specifically on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The materials generally include: Western and communist media coverage of the Revolution and its aftermath; documents relating to political trials in Hungary between 1955-1960; RFE reports, Information Items, press surveys; posters and leaflets from Western and communist countries; photographs; copies of publications and extracts of books on the Revolution; audio recordings from official and unofficial Hungarian radio; a chronological handbook of the main events; media coverage and documents relating to the UN's handling of the 1956 Revolution; coverage of the 20th anniversary conference in Paris; the 1956 Counter-Revolution in the villages; the Soviet intervention and civil and human rights abuses; list of people holding important positions in the party, state administration, and public life (October 1958 to February 1966); Hungarian poets' writings on tyranny.

***Audiovisual materials from the Hungarian Unit:***

- Voices of the Revolution, October 23-November 4, 1956, open reel tape, 30 minutes

Recording of 16 items including news items, official communiqués and excerpts from speeches of major figures of the Revolution, broadcast by Radio Kossuth.

- Battle Sounds November 4, 1956, open reel tape, 30 minutes  
Sound recordings of gunfire and artillery missiles directed against the revolutionary Hungarians by the intruding Soviet troops.
- Interviews, 1970-1980, open reel tape, 60 minutes  
Interviews with witnesses of the 1956 Revolution most probably conducted at the RFE Headquarters in Munich.

- Photographs of professional (AP, UPI) and non-professional photographers taken during the 1956 Revolution, 250 black and white prints
- Photographs documenting the "Hungary 1956" exhibition on the 30th anniversary of the Revolution held at RFE/RL Headquarters in Munich, 40 black and white prints
- Photographs of plots No. 301 and 282 in Új Köztemető [New Public Cemetery]: burial-mounds of revolutionaries, who were executed and then buried in unidentified graves, 6 color prints

***HU OSA 300-50 Polish Unit****HU OSA 300-50-1 Subject Files*

- 114/114G Polish October, 1956, 1956-1957
- 114.25 Contacts with Foreign Communist Parties: Hungary, 1956, 150 pages
- 114.5NC New Line (Course), 1956, 150 pages
- 125.3 Party Delegations Abroad, 1956-1957, 300 pages

*Polish Biographical Card Files*

- Wladyslaw Gomulka, 1956-1957, 400 pages

*HU OSA 300-50-6 Polish Monitoring*

[October 18, 1956 - December 12, 1956, 0.25 lm]

***HU OSA 300-55 Polish Underground Publications Unit****HU OSA 300-55-2 Polish Underground Monographs*

This series contains 10 items that are of particular interest for the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

- Bak, Henryk: Uwagi o rewolucji w 1956 roku [Notes on the 1956 Revolution], 1979
- Budapeszt 1956 oczami polskich dziennikarzy [Budapest in 1956 as Seen by a Polish Journalist], Warsaw, 1986
- Galicjanin (Kastory, Andrzej): Komunisti na Wegrzech, 1945-1956 [Communists in Hungary], Krakow, 1985
- Gosztonyi Péter: Pal Maleter; Wegry [Hungary] 1956, Warsaw, 1985
- Kende Péter: Rozwazania o historii Wegier [Considering Hungarian History], 1983

- Kis János: Wegry [Hungary] 1956-57; Czas odbudowy systemu [Rebuilding the System], Warsaw, 1989
- Kopácsi Sándor: 13 dni nadziei, Wegry 1956 [13 Days of Hope, Hungary 1956]
- Micunovic, Veljko: Dziennik Moskiewski 1956 [Moscow Diary 1956], Warsaw, 1989
- Mikes, George: Powstanie węgierskie [The Hungarian Uprising], 1986
- Woroszyński, Wiktor, Dziennik Węgierski 1956 wraz z glossami 1976, 1981, 1986 [Hungarian Diary 1956], Warszawa, 1986

*HU OSA 300-55-3 Subject Files*

- Hungary, 1986-1989, 200 pages

***HU OSA 300-60 Romanian Unit***

The materials consist of Romanian and Western newspaper clippings, RFE/RL Background and Situation Reports, news agency releases, Romanian radio monitoring materials. Files are primarily in Romanian and English.

*HU OSA 300-60-1 Subject Files*

- 309 Armed Forces: Soviet Armed Forces, 1953-1956, 0.03 Im
- 602 Communist Party: Foreign Relations: Hungary, 1954-1964, 0.05 Im
- 1012 Education: Universities, Colleges, and Institutes, 1948-1958, 0.03 Im
- 1505 Foreign Relations: Relations with Other Countries: Hungary, 1952-1959, 0.03 Im
- 1803 Justice: Sentences, 1948-1961, 0.05 Im
- 2000 Morale and General Mood, 1955-1960, 0.05 Im
- 2200 Persecution and Purges, 1954-1958, 0.03 Im
- 2300 Police and Security, 1951-1958, 0.03 Im
- 2903 Resistance and Criticism of the Regime: Political, 1956-1971, 0.03 Im

***HU OSA 300-80 Soviet "Red" Archives***

*HU OSA 300-80-1 All-Union General Files*

- Венгрия [Hungary]: Kádár in Moscow, 1957, 30 pages

- Венгрия [Hungary]: СССР (отношения): советские войска [USSR (Relationship): Soviet Troops], 1959-1993, 0.02 lm
- Венгрия [Hungary]: СССР (отношения) [USSR (Relationship)], 1986-1993, 50 pages

*HU OSA 300-80-13 Non-USSR Biographical Files*

- Kádár János, 1962-1990, 0.01 lm
- Nagy Imre, 1966-1993, 40 pages
- Rákosi Mátyás, 1971-1973, 20 pages

**HU OSA 300-85 Samizdat Archives**

*HU OSA 300-85-13 Biographical Files*

These files include newspaper clippings, news agency releases, monitoring materials, RFE/RL research papers, as well as copies of Samizdat documents.

- Кадар, Янош [Kádár János], 1977-1988, 15 pages

Additional information from the RFE/RL Research Institute materials pertaining to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution is also available in the unprocessed collection of *Information Items* (77 microfilm rolls), covering the years 1951-1956.

**HU OSA 302 Samizdat Publications of Gábor Demszky**

1970-1990, 7.00 lm

Gábor Demszky was one of the most important Hungarian samizdat publishers in the 1980s. His independent publishing house called AB, edited and published samizdat periodicals and books. Because 1956 was the focus of much of the activity of the Hungarian opposition, many books and papers he published have dealt with this topic. The materials include manuscripts, books, periodicals and documentation of the process of publishing samizdat (self-published) during the communist era in Hungary. Demszky's publications are valuable research resources providing insight into the non-official view of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

**HU OSA 303 Collection of András Mihályhegyi  
Relating to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution**

1953-1960, 0.50 lm

András Mihályhegyi was a young student in 1956 who left Hungary after the Revolution. While still in the country, he collected original materials documenting the then current events. This small fonds contains leaflets, posters, and newspapers, as well as some rare essays, and short monographs he wrote in Germany between 1957 and 1960.

**HU OSA 306 Collective Fonds: Audiovisual Materials  
Relating to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution**

*HU OSA 306-0-1 Video materials relating to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*

- 39 VHS videotapes (feature, documentary, and propaganda films)

*HU OSA 306-0-2 Audio materials relating to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*

- 1 audiotape, 60 minutes

The tape contains excerpts from the Programs of *Radio Free Europe: Hungarian Desk, Oct 27- Nov 4, 1956*: audio recordings of news programs; comments on the Hungarian events; excerpts from speeches of prominent Hungarian politicians; re-broadcast of programs of the Hungarian "Freedom" radio stations.

***Library materials***

The OSA Library holds a special collection of books, pamphlets, brochures, reference books, chronologies on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, including 129 titles.

[http://www.osa.ceu.hu/library/special\\_collections/books/sbjct-16.htm](http://www.osa.ceu.hu/library/special_collections/books/sbjct-16.htm)

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### **Publications by the RFE/RL Research Institute**

**Press Surveys**, averaging 15 pages each, consist of original language articles or English translations of the most important articles appearing in the East European press. Such surveys were made for Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

**Information Items** are based on interviews made in Western Europe with visitors and refugees from Eastern Europe.

**Situation Reports** contain summaries of current developments in Eastern Europe. These reports were prepared by the national units twice a week.

**Background Reports** are special studies providing perspectives on current events and trends in the communist world. The reports were issued on a regular basis, as well as in response to sudden developments, such as government reshuffle or an unannounced meeting of communist leaders.



## Information for researchers

Open Society Archives is an open-access facility committed to making materials available to users on equal terms of access.

**On-site reference services** are provided in the Research Room, every work-day from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Every researcher must obtain a researcher identification card at the OSA Reception Desk which is valid for two years. Research status is available to anyone at least 16 years old.

The Archives provides **copying services** in the following formats: electrostatic reproductions, videotape and audiotape, and photographs.

The **OSA website** is designed to provide basic description of OSA reference services available online, and other information of interest to **off-site researchers** (including the OSA Restriction Statement, citation recommendations etc.).

**General reference or research questions** may be sent via e-mail, regular mail, fax or phone (see information on back cover). OSA staff does not perform research on behalf of researchers. However, researchers may request that copies of documents relevant to their research interest be delivered by express mail or regular mail, or by fax.

OSA offers a variety of **grants** to scholars, archivists, journalists, artists and others exploring the fields covered by OSA's holdings.

**Research grants** are offered on a competitive basis to support scholars who wish to pursue research in OSA's holdings. These grants provide travel to and from Budapest, a modest stipend, and accommodation in Budapest for a maximum research period of two months. The application, including a research description plan, C.V., and two letters of recommendation should be sent to the Research Grant Selection Committee, OSA. The Selection Committee normally meets four times a year in March, June, September and December.

OSA regularly offers **other grants** to scholars, artists or journalists who wish to carry out projects related to topics covered by the Archives' programs, and exhibitions to be hosted by Galeria Centralis.

Available issues:

- 1 Raoul Wallenberg
- 2 The Environment
- 3 The Roma (Gypsies)
- 4 The 1956 Hungarian Revolution
- 5 Church and Religion
- 6 Nonconformist Artists in the USSR, 1956-1986
- 7 Prague Spring 1968
- 8 Forced Labor Camps Under Communism

FURTHER INFORMATION:

**Open Society Archives at Central European University**

H-1051 Budapest, Nádor u. 9. • H-1245 Budapest, P.O. Box 1082 Hungary  
tel.: +36 1 327-3250 • fax: 327-3260 • [archives@ceu.hu](mailto:archives@ceu.hu) • [www.osa.ceu.hu](http://www.osa.ceu.hu)