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Two Myths about "The Voices": Experiences of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*

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Abstract. *The article explores the role of international radio broadcasting, with a specific focus on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), throughout the Cold War era, particularly in Lithuania and the broader Eastern Bloc context. It analyses the influence of these broadcasts, known as "the Voices," in countering Soviet propaganda and disseminating alternative news to populations living behind the Iron Curtain. The study highlights two crucial aspects, which the author argues attained near-mythical significance: the messengers (i.e., broadcasters) and the content of their messages. Despite Soviet propaganda's allegations depicting RFE/RL personnel as detached émigrés, as agents of Western intelligence agencies or as former collaborators with Nazis, the text asserts that RFE/RL maintained journalistic autonomy. The Soviet strategy of jamming international broadcasts was complemented by a myth alleging that during the guerrilla struggle for Lithuanian independence at the onset of Soviet occupation, international broadcasters purposefully exacerbated tensions and disseminated unfounded or even false promises of*

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Western assistance. The article rebuts these claims, noting the absence of international broadcasting in Lithuanian during that period. Drawing from recently disclosed documents from the KGB archives, the article demonstrates that despite censorship and efforts to manipulate information, Western broadcasts continued to shape public opinion and reinforce aspirations for independence and democracy in regions under Soviet control.
Keywords: *International broadcasting, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Cold War, propaganda, journalistic autonomy*

Du mitai apie „balsus“: *Laisvės* / *Laisvosios Europos radijo* patirtys

Santrauka. *Autorius nagrinėja tarptautinio radijo vaidmenį, ypatingo dėmesio skirdamas transliavusiam per visą Šaltojo karo laikotarpį „Laisvosios Europos“ radijui/„Laisvės“ radijui (RFE/RL), reikšmingam ypač Lietuvoje ir Rytų bloko šalyse. Jame analizuojama stočių, vadintų „balsais“, įtaka kovojant su sovietų propaganda ir platinant alternatyvias naujienas už geležinės uždangos gyvenusiems klausytojams. Tyrime išryškinami du esminiai veiksniai, autoriaus teigimu, įgiję beveik istorinio mito reikšmės: pranešėjai (t. y. transliuotojai) ir jų pranešimų turinys. Nepaisant sovietinės propagandos kaltinimų, kuriuose RFE/RL darbuotojai vaizduojami kaip atskirti emigrantai, kaip Vakarų žvalgybos agentūrų agentai arba buvę nacių bendradarbiai, tekste teigiama, kad RFE/RL išlaikė žurnalistinę autonomiją. Sovietinę tarptautinių transliacijų trukdymo strategiją papildė mitas, kuriuo suponuota, jog, prasidėjus sovietinei okupacijai partizaninėje kovoje už Lietuvos nepriklausomybę, tarptautinės radijo stotys esą tikslingai didino įtampą ir skleidė nepagrįstus ar net melagingus Vakarų pagalbos pažadus. Straipsnyje šie teiginiai paneigiami, pažymint, jog tuo laikotarpiu nebuvo tarptautinių transliacijų lietuvių kalba. Remiantis neseniai paviešintais KGB archyvų dokumentais, straipsnis parodo, kad, nepaisant cenzūros ir pastangų manipuliuoti informacija, Vakarų laidos ir toliau formavo viešąją nuomonę bei stiprino Nepriklausomybės ir demokratijos siekius sovietų kontroliuojamuose regionuose.*
Pagrindiniai žodžiai: *Tarptautinė transliacija, Laisvosios Europos radijas/Laisvės radijas (RFE/RL), Šaltasis karas, propaganda, žurnalistų autonomija*

Two decades have passed since Radio Free Europe (RFE) last broadcasted in Lithuanian on January 31, 2004. This timeframe offers ample opportunity to reflect on the broadcaster's history and its significant role in the upheavals of the last quarter of the 20th century. Originating in 1974 and commencing broadcasts the following year as part of Radio Liberty (RL), it was symbolically rebranded as RFE in 1984, and operated for nearly three decades. Throughout its existence, RFE/RL played a crucial role in observing the relaxation of tensions between the West and East during Détente, while also championing democracy and human rights in Soviet-occupied territories amidst the strains of the Cold War. The Lithuanian service of RFE/RL closely followed the Perestroika reforms in the Soviet Union and witnessed the fight for Lithuanian independence. Despite various hesitations regarding the mission of RFE/RL following the fall of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, its broadcasts continued until Lithuania's accession to NATO and the European Union.

Recent interest in the history of international broadcasting has been sparked by the shifting dynamics of the new Cold War and facilitated by the accessibility of new archival sources. Additionally, former employees' efforts to reflect on their experiences have contributed to this burgeoning interest. These trends have led to a significant body of literature, comprising books and articles that aim to assess the impact of RFE/RL during the Cold War (Cummings, 2009, 2014, 2021; Puddington, 2000), analyse various aspects of international broadcasting (Grutza, 2019; Johnson, 2018; Johnson & Parta, 2010; Parta, 2022; Pleikys, 1998; А. Колчина, 2022), and offer personal reflections through reminiscences (Critchlow, 1995; Snyder, 2012; Sosin, 2010; Tumanov, 1993; Urban, 1997).

In Lithuania, notable research by Arlauskaitė-Zakšauskienė (Arlauskaitė Zakšauskienė, 2019; Arlauskaitė-Zakšauskienė, 2019; Zakšauskienė, 2015, 2019), combining investigations from Lithuanian and American archives, has provided a comprehensive history of American broadcasting to Lithuania. Additionally, there has been important re-

search on the reception of radio broadcasts during the post-war period (Bagušauskas, 2001; Juodis, 2021; Laukaitytė, 2019) and efforts by the KGB to counter Western radio broadcasts (Ramašauskas, 2008). The KGB archives, to some extent accessible in Lithuania and partly available online (www.kgbveikla.lt), contain valuable insights into RFE/RL activities, shedding light on how Communist secret services attempted to restrict access to the spread of information from the West. These documents underscore the extent to which international broadcasters posed a challenge to Communist regimes and their concerted efforts to control information flow within their territories.

The burgeoning field of research in international broadcasting holds significant potential, offering opportunities to re-evaluate pivotal aspects of 20th-century history, unearth new insights into Cold War confrontations, and revisit old cases of propaganda. Moreover, it enables deliberation on recent attempts by democratic nations to influence populations residing in closed autocratic societies.

In this article, we aim to offer two perspectives on the history of RFE/RL: firstly, by examining the perceptions surrounding the broadcaster, and secondly, by analysing the comprehension of the message delivered by the international broadcasters. Given that RFE/RL operated beyond the reach of its audiences, shielded by the Iron Curtain, the messenger and the message assumed a quasi-mythical status, inadvertently elevating international broadcasters to the status of prophetic figures. However, the demystification of these entrenched myths presented an opportunity for counter-propaganda efforts, which Communist rulers were quick to exploit.

The Myth of the Messenger

During the Cold War, which lasted for over four decades, Lithuania was targeted by various Western radio broadcasts primarily stationed in the Vatican, West Germany, USA, Italy, or Spain. These broadcasts, openly or covertly supported by the United States government, initiated and staffed by native Lithuanians living in exile, were collectively

known within the target country as "the Voices" ("Balsai" in Lithuanian). This simplified name was inherited from the principal American broadcaster the *Voice of America* (*VOA* Lithuanian programmes aired from 1951 till 2004). However, the hawkish character of "the Voices" was largely shaped by the other American radio station *RFE/RL* (broadcasting in Lithuanian from 1975 till 2004), which symbolised the fight against communism and became a principal victim of Soviet radio jamming and a prime target of counter propaganda campaigns. These two American radio stations overshadowed all the other players on the international broadcasting stage, including the official broadcaster of the Holy See, *Radio Vaticana*, which was the first to begin international broadcasting in Lithuanian (1940-1, resumed in 1946) and is still on air today. Other actors such as *Radio Nacional de España* (broadcasting in Lithuanian from 1955 to 1963) or *Radiotelevisione Italiana* (1952-2007) played supplementary roles in comparison.

The official image of "the Voices," promoted by the Communists, and the informal image supported by laypeople, maintained significant differences. Soviet occupiers and their collaborators made concerted efforts to portray international broadcasters not as journalistic endeavours but as examples of enemy psychological warfare (i.e., military) operations. This interpretation aligned with the worldview centred on the dichotomy of the superior "red forces," backed by the progressive elements of humanity (i.e., the proletariat), promising an inevitable bright future for society. On the opposing side were the vilified "white gangs," representing the enemies of the people (i.e., capitalists), destined to be relegated to the dustbin of history. Under Soviet rule, propaganda was not a pejorative term (as evidenced by the presence of a "Propaganda and Agitation" department in every regional Communist Party organisation). "The Voices" were depicted as sinister tools of hostile intelligence services, perceived as integral components in an ideological struggle for the hearts and minds of the ostensibly naive and unsuspecting populace. The confrontation on the airwaves was viewed as a natural extension of conventional warfare tactics.

The lay understanding of "the Voices" was largely shaped by prevailing negative sentiments towards Soviet occupation and communist propaganda efforts. Living in isolation from the outside world, where contacts with the West were severely restricted or channelled exclusively through Moscow, created a genuine demand for "alternative news." While the concept of "alternative news" today often raises reasonable scepticism, during the Cold War, "alternative" connoted "free" and "independent." Those who provided news from the free world were thus regarded as trustworthy messengers from beyond the iron curtain.

One of the fundamental principles of communist propaganda was to challenge the credibility of the messengers, attempting to discredit the broadcasters of "the Voices." However, this task was not as straightforward as it might seem initially. The earliest international broadcaster, *Radio Vaticana*, was primarily staffed by the clergy who held significant authority in Catholic Lithuania, particularly in rural areas. The *VOA* was highly selective in its staffing, applying strict criteria for employment; its Lithuanian service directors were American citizens by birth, while other employees hailed from the cultural elite of the refugee community. Perhaps the most vulnerable target was the Lithuanian service of Radio Nacional de España, which fell under the influence of *VLIK* (*Vyriausiasis Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo Komitetas* - The Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania). Since *VLIK* was not officially recognized as the legal representative of the nation by any Western government, its dedication to the cause of Lithuania's liberation was often ridiculed in Soviet propaganda as irresponsible and irrational. Its members were sarcastically labelled as "liberators" ("vaduotojai") (Morkus, 1968).

The arduous efforts of Soviet propaganda aimed at discrediting "the Voices" were based on three main propositions: (1) the producers of the broadcasts were portrayed as emigrants who had lost touch with their target countries and reality; (2) the radio stations were depicted as nests of intelligence service agents, primarily the CIA; (3) the broadcasters were accused of collaborating with the Nazis. According to Gene Sosin, a longtime employee of *RFE/RL*, "[t]here was some truth

to those accusations, because early recruits from among the émigrés in Western Europe included former Soviet citizens who had fought on the German side. It is also a fact that the CIA secretly funded Radio Liberty during its first eighteen years" (Sosin, 2010).

Soviet propaganda was adept at exploiting this "some truth" to construct its own "great truth." As Anna Kolchina observed (А. С. Колчина, 2016), under the communist rule, there was a deliberate silence regarding the creative achievements of emigrants, creating the impression that anyone who left their homeland was condemned to obscurity. Soviet censors swiftly removed books by authors who had fled the USSR, such as Tomas Venclova or Aušra Marija Sluckaitė-Jurašienė, from libraries. Theatres often staged plays without crediting the emigrant producers, such as Jonas Jurašas, for decades. In the rare instances when the broadcasters of "the Voices" were mentioned, it was usually in an extremely negative context, with their names even being used for mockery. For instance, Jonas Lukoševičius, the chief editor of a counter-propaganda outlet at Lithuanian Radio producing programs for Lithuanians living abroad, played with the surnames of RFE/RL broadcasters like Jurašas, whom he derogatorily referred to as "Judašai" (a pejorative association with Judas Iscariot, a symbol of betrayal in Christianity)(Lukoševičius, 1983).

Soviet propaganda was quick to produce TV "documentaries" about international broadcasters, with titles such as "Criminals at '*Liberty*'"(Кузнецов, 1972), "Radio Saboteurs" (Осьминин, 1973), and "Saboteurs of the Aether" (Диверсанты Эфира, 1976), leaving no room for doubt about the attitude of their creators. Similarly, propaganda books of the time, often published under the guise of "research", propagated a vehemently negative portrayal of "the Voices" (Панфилов, 1974; Яковлев, 1983; Ярошенко, 1986) and labelled "the Voices" as "propaganda and sabotage centres" or "American subversive centres, which are making sophisticated attempts to create new myths [...] about the 'Soviet military threat', about 'human rights violations' in socialist countries..."

Both *RFE* and *RL* were indeed established with covert financial support from the American government. However, the concept of broadcasting to territories occupied by the Soviets was a collaborative effort involving refugee organisations, civic society groups, and the intelligence community. The parent organisations of the radios – the National Committee for Free Europe (*NCFE*, later known as the Free Europe Committee) and the American Committee for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia (*ACLPR*, also known as the American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism) - were established in 1949 and 1950, respectively. Participants in these entities were motivated by different yet not contradictory drives: the refugees, who had abandoned hope of a swift return to their homeland, sought to advocate for freedom; American civic organisations focused on promoting democracy; and the intelligence community was keen on establishing contacts with occupied countries and acquiring reliable information from beyond the Iron Curtain.

The Free Europe Committee, the parent organisation of *RFE*, played a pivotal role in mobilising a widespread movement within the United States known as the Crusade for Freedom, which rallied thousands of Americans around the idea of aiding nations oppressed by communism (Cummings, 2014). These actions created the illusion that all the Committee's activities could be financed solely through voluntary donations from ordinary American citizens. However, broadcasting is an expensive endeavour, and most of the costs were covered by the US government through covert funding facilitated with the assistance of the CIA. Paul B. Henze, who served as *RFE*'s deputy political advisor in the 1950s and is often referred to as a CIA operative, argues that "[t]he CIA had little impact on development of broadcasting policy, for the CIA officials who provided funding and bureaucratic support (for example, security clearances) recognized that it was best to let the FEC develop operations and manage them without direct governmental inference. The eminent men who made up the FEC itself would have agreed to no other arrangement" (Johnson & Parta, 2010).

RFE and *RL* (which at the time were distinct institutions, with RL's parent organisation never undertaking such a broad search for public support in the US as FEC) became exemplars of so-called "surrogate radio." These are international broadcasters that function as substitutes for full-service national radio stations for the countries governed by repressive regimes. It's unsurprising that such "surrogate radios" could only flourish when staffed by independent radio personalities and able to cultivate the trust of their audience. During the first two decades of their existence the CIA support for the Radios was an open secret, however, as another insider Arch Puddington witnessed:

> Radio Free Europe was unique among international broadcasting stations in the autonomy enjoyed by its editors. Whereas other services employed scripts that were centrally written and then translated for use by the language services, RFE practically never used centrally written scripts. Nor were the various language services compelled to broadcast specific commentaries. It was assumed, of course, that the editors shared RFE's objectives. There were also guidelines relating to broadcast tone, admittedly loosely enforced in the early years. Otherwise, editors had considerable latitude in the selection of the daily broadcast schedule (Puddington, 2000).

According to Puddington, *RFE/RL* emerged as the largest, most costly, and notably successful assets within the CIA's portfolio of intellectual properties. Consequently, it was inevitable that the association between these broadcasting entities and the CIA would eventually come to light. Criticism from American leftist media initially surfaced in the 1960s, but the situation became further entangled in the 1970s when the U.S. Congress began deliberating on the status of *RFE* and *RL*. The congressional discussions revolved around two primary issues. Firstly, there was significant concern regarding the financial implications, with critics noting that *RFE* and *RL* were absorbing millions of taxpayer dollars. Moreover, the rationale behind investing in international broadcasting came under scrutiny, particularly among proponents of a more

dovish foreign policy stance. Secondly, there was a notable lack of accountability, as funding was funnelled through the CIA, resulting in appropriations to the broadcasters being shrouded in secrecy.

It is essential to consider the influence of the international situation as well. The Social Democrats, upon assuming power in West Germany (the host country of *RFE* and *RL*), adopted a significantly more hostile stance towards the radios. "The Brandt government preferred that the radios abandon Germany for another host country but was unwilling to directly challenge the American government by refusing a license renewal" (Puddington, 2000). Furthermore, Willy Brandt's successor as Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, raised questions about Radio Free Europe during his meetings with the U.S. President Jimmy Carter (Brzezinski, 1977).

However, the most consistent opponent of the radios was the influential chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, J. William Fulbright, who openly appealed to President Richard Nixon, stating, "Mr. President, I submit that these radios should be given an opportunity to take their rightful place in the graveyard of cold-war relics" (Kamm, 1972). According to "The New York Times",

> [t]he disclosure that *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Liberty* operated on funds secretly supplied by the Central Intelligence Agency set off in the United States a heated debate on the propriety of continuing to pretend that they were private institutions supported by charitable contributions, and that debate ultimately led to Fulbright's stand. But the disclosures and the debate caused no concern among the stations' listeners. They continue to tune in with as much faith as an American might bring to a newspaper that has a decent record for factual reporting and an editorial policy with which he agrees more often than not. Their devotion is almost unmatched in countries that offer more than one credible source of news (Kamm, 1972).

The American government harboured no intention of relinquishing an effective tool that proved highly valuable during the Cold War. Despite Senator Fulbright's objections, a new system was devised to ensure the continued existence of the radios. Unlike the *VOA*, which operated as a governmental institution, the radios were spared this fate. The U.S. Congress established the Board for International Broadcasting (BIB) as a distinct entity and opted to finance the radios through transparent congressional appropriations. The primary objective behind the formation of BIB was to safeguard the autonomy of *RFE/RL* from political interference. Consequently, when governments in Eastern Europe raised questions about the international radio broadcasts, the U.S. State Department offered a clear response, affirming that the Radios are independent and safeguarded by the right to freedom of information. Puddington observed another aspect of the situation:

> The State Department officials with whom *RFE* dealt directly were usually favorably disposed toward the station's mission and understood that *RFE* was meant to play a different role than the Voice of America. Nevertheless, some could not understand how a station funded by public money could be given the high degree of autonomy that *RFE* continued to enjoy; these officials occasionally suggested the institution of prebroadcast script reviews. The issue, however, was never pressed, and the policy of permitting individual broadcasts a high degree of journalistic independence remained in place (Puddington, 2000).

If such journalistic independence was barely comprehensible to American administrators, it's unsurprising that communist ideologues were utterly confused. A paradox emerged:

> If given a choice between the CIA and the State Department, *RFE* clearly preferred the administrative control of the intelligence agency. The natural tension between *RFE* and the diplomats posted to Eastern Europe was accentuated after Eastern Europe underwent de-Stalinization. As the

> regimes' isolation gave way to more normal contacts with Western diplomats, regime complaints about *RFE* broadcast were taken more seriously by American ambassadors and, at times, by the State Department in Washington. […] Where objections to *RFE* programs were formerly ignored, now American ambassadors were sometimes inclined to side with the complaining regimes and to view *RFE* as a nuisance that complicated their diplomatic functions. By contrast, life with the CIA was free of overt tension (Puddington, 2000).

To no surprise, Senator Fulbright's campaign against the radios provided ample material for Soviet propaganda. The aforementioned Soviet TV "documentary," titled "Criminals at '*Liberty*,'" capitalised on the revelations about the radios in Congress. The underlying message was clear: if American officials are openly discussing the relationship between the radios and the CIA, it must indeed be a significant issue.

Indeed, *RFE/RL* served as invaluable sources for gathering data on Eastern Bloc countries and the Soviet Union, which were among the most closed and secretive societies with limited access to the West. The Research Institute of *RFE/RL* subscribed to various media outlets, systematically organising and analysing the gathered information. Monitoring radio broadcasts, and later television transmissions, as well as conducting interviews with rare tourists in the West, constituted essential sources of the knowledge. Moreover, the radios possessed the most comprehensive collection of samizdat, clandestine literature circulated in the Soviet bloc, which was meticulously examined to discern authentic material from KGB-generated forgeries aimed at discrediting the dissident movement. *RFE/RL* were committed to sharing these intellectual resources, primarily sourced from open channels, with official American institutions, including the State Department and the CIA. This collaboration facilitated a deeper understanding of the political and social dynamics within these closed societies.

Soviet propaganda consistently sought to portray the radios as clandestine tools of intelligence gathering, implying that they served

as branches of Western espionage agencies. However, it's important to note that the concept of secrecy differed significantly between the Eastern Bloc and the Western world. In the Soviet Union, virtually any mention of topics such as public health, production data, or maps was classified as secret. Notably, reference books during that time period treated figures like Kamenev or Bukharin, and other communist leaders as "state secrets." While encyclopaedias might include entries on "Trotskyists", information about Trotsky himself was often omitted. A striking example illustrating the extent of secrecy within the Soviet system is the famous secret report delivered by Nikita Khrushchev to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956. Access to this classified document was highly restricted. When the report was leaked to *RL* and subsequently broadcasted, it garnered significant attention. The dissemination of this document greatly contributed to *RL* popularity and bolstered public trust in its broadcasts. However, essentially, it served as a conduit for delivering the communist message to a population governed by the communist ideology. This episode underscores the contrast between the Soviet Union's culture of secrecy and the commitment of *RL* to transparency and information dissemination.

The perceived influence of secret services within the radios was a recurring topic of discussion. However, it's important to recognize that the majority of the staff comprised ordinary journalists. Nonetheless, when Oleg Tumanov, a KGB operative, managed to ascend to a prominent editorial position within the Russian Service and then abruptly disappeared in 1986, only to resurface in Moscow a few months later, concerns about infiltration became more pronounced. Some lighthearted jokes circulated within the radios, with quips about not knowing whether the CIA or the KGB had more operatives present. The prevailing popular presumption leaned towards the latter. Evidence from uncovered materials in the Lithuanian KGB archives attests to the thorough monitoring and awareness of the activities of the radios by Soviet secret services. This suggests that the KGB was well-informed about the operations and personnel within *RFE/RL*.

The Lithuanian Service had its own mysterious story involving a returnee to the Soviets. In February 1985, Bronius Venclova sought asylum in the American embassy in Zaire. A young Lithuanian and graduate of Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, he had escaped from the Soviet mission in Congo-Brazzaville. His life story received significant coverage in Lithuanian language media across the United States, B. Venclova found employment in RFE's New York office. Alongside his relative, the well-known public intellectual T. Venclova, Aleksandras Štromas, and others, he participated as a witness in the Copenhagen Tribunal in 1985. This public trial of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States garnered attention in Western media and was viewed as a serious provocation by the Soviets (KGB, 1984b). However, if B. Venclova was indeed a KGB implant, as his biography suggests (including his refusal to serve in the Soviet army, treatment in a psychiatric clinic, military service, studies at Moscow University for foreigners, and immediate appointment to the diplomatic service), then his mission at the radios may not have been a great success, particularly when compared to Tumanov, who had served the Russian service of RL for nearly two decades and provided valuable information to the KGB.

Egidijus Ramašauskas suggests that B. Venclova may have been recalled to cover up an agent who remained in the Radios (Ramašauskas, 2008). However, Puddington's attitude toward the returnee is more moderate. He recalls:

> Bronius worked in the New York office for about a year until, one day, we received word that he had decided to return to the Soviet Union. Apparently, the KGB had persuaded his mother to make an emotional appeal for his return, and Bronius, who was lonely and isolated in New York, succumbed. On his return to Lithuania he made several obligatory propaganda appearances and gave an interview to a Soviet newspaper in which he criticized RFE in rather mild terms (Puddington, 2000).

It appears that B. Venclova was isolated from the main body of the Lithuanian service of RFE/RL, which was based in Munich, while he spent most of his time in the New York bureau. His return to Lithuania was publicised rather modestly; a documentary by Lithuanian TV titled "The Road Back" ("Kelias atgal") was screened without broader resonance (Bušma, 1987).

The KGB documents indicate that B. Venclova provided some information about the internal affairs of the radio (KGB, 1987). However, it's noteworthy that most of this information was already known to Moscow. The fact that in the documents the returnee is referred to directly by his name, without any coding or nicknaming, raises doubts about whether B. Venclova could have had a special mission and was deliberately infiltrated into *RFE/RL*. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that the story evolved during the Perestroika years, when the attention of Soviet counterintelligence began shifting in other directions, with only a few years remaining until the cessation of the jamming of all international broadcasts. The subsequent life of B. Venclova did not reveal his relationship with the KGB; he remained a private citizen with a rather unsuccessful life, marked by alcoholism, divorce, and other personal struggles (Mičiulienė, 2011).

The KGB's interest in the "messengers" of *RFE/RL's* Lithuanian service was evident even before their inaugural broadcasts. By April 3, 1974, the Lithuanian branch of the KGB in Vilnius had received intelligence regarding plans to establish a Lithuanian service within RL (KGB, 1974a). Agents were tasked with identifying the relatives and associates of radio personnel, gathering information about their backgrounds, including any wartime activities and potential collaboration with the Nazis. Subsequently, the Lithuanian KGB devised an action plan against RL, code-named "Skorpiony." Operatives stationed in West Germany were instructed to focus their attention and efforts on infiltrating the radio and initiating what were termed "operative games." This involved leveraging existing agents like Vilius and Šarūnas, who had already established contact with radio personnel, while agent Jokūbas was assigned

to procure material from a source codenamed Lituanistas. Additionally, the KGB planned to dispatch agent Edikas, who, being Jewish and possessing potential emigration opportunities, was deemed valuable due to his acquaintance with a broadcaster known as Oratorius (KGB, 1974b). Subsequent reports from operatives indicated successful identification of all staff members and their connections in Lithuania (Burinskaitė, 2011).

However, there is a prevailing belief that Communist agents never had the capability to influence the content of the broadcasts. Puddington argues that "There is, in fact, evidence that agents were discouraged from meddling in broadcast policy, since that might lead to their unmasking. The spies provided their masters with cabinets full of files, and all manner of interesting gossip. But the radios' message remained unchanged" (Puddington, 2000).

Persistent efforts by the KGB to infiltrate and influence the Lithuanian service were met with only moderate success over time. Archive documents reveal that in 1984, the KGB made the decision to recommence operations targeting Kajetonas Čeginskas (KGB, 1984a), who served as the head of the service at that time. KGB operatives were instructed to gather information about the radio by questioning individuals returning from visits abroad (KGB, without date). It appears that on certain occasions, information was promptly obtained. For instance, in 1985, the KGB was notified in advance about the new hires of Kazys Eringis and Rita Baltušytė into the VOA (KGB, 1985).

The Lithuanian service managed to evade direct harassment from Soviet special services, such as killings or bombings. Sosin recalls mysterious deaths of radio employees in 1954.

> In September, the body of Leonid Karas, a Belorussian writer, was found in the Isar River near Munich. Two months later, Abo Fatalibey, chief of the Azerbaijani desk, was garroted in his apartment by a suspected Soviet agent. Although the Karas case was never solved, the Radio also ascribed it to the KGB. Other émigrés received telephone calls and letters from family

members inside the Soviet Union who urged them to stop working for the enemy and to come home (Sosin, 2010).

One of the most notable victims of assassinations by communist special services was Bulgarian Georgi Markov, who was killed in a sophisticated manner (poisoned with ricin injected from a specially designed umbrella on a street in London) in 1978.

> Markov received regular death threats from the time he began working for the *BBC* and *RFE*. Markov's stock response was to inform the caller that if he were killed, he would die a martyr, and the accuracy of his claims about the brutality of Bulgarian security would be demonstrated. Shortly before his death, however, Markov's caller warned that he would be killed by a poison no Western scientist could detect and thus denied a hero's stature (Puddington, 2000).

Three years later, the *RFE/RL* headquarters in Munich were bombed by a terrorist group led by the infamous Carlos the Jackal (Ramírez Sánchez) in 1981. This attack was the only one of its kind targeting the Radios, believed to have been ordered by Romanian special services. However, prior to this incident, similar actions were unsuccessfully attempted by Czechoslovak secret agent Pavel Minařík, who infiltrated the Radio and worked there until 1976.

RFE/RL employees were advised against visiting target countries to avoid potential provocations. However, with Gorbachev's Perestroika opening doors to Lithuania, even the relatives of employees became targets of harassment. For instance, when Ona Girnienė visited relatives in Lithuania in 1986, KGB operatives in Vilnius and Riga conducted secret searches in her hotel room, solely because her two sons worked for *RFE/RL* (KGB, 1986a, 1986b). The interest of KGB agents persisted until the very end of the Soviet Union. Even in February 1990, just weeks before declaration of Lithuanian independence, KGB agents were gathering information about the mood within *RFE/RL* secretly

monitoring editor Sluckaitė-Jurašienė, who was visiting a friend (KGB, 1990).

The research conducted by Inga Arlauskaitė-Zakšauskienė reveals that the establishment of Baltic language services in 1974 within *RL* was the culmination of consistent and prolonged efforts by emigre organisations (Zakšauskienė, 2015). Initially, all endeavours were focused on *RFE*, given the perception that Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were merely occupied territories, whose incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940 was deemed illegal and unrecognised by Western governments. Consequently, Baltic communities advocated for broadcasts in their native languages to be delivered by *RFE*, which was responsible for covering all European countries under Soviet influence. On the other hand, *RL* was originally created to serve oppressed nations within the Soviet Union and technically the Baltic states were three Soviet republics. However, the leadership of *RFE* showed little interest in expanding the scope of their broadcasts, and various studies on potential Baltic audiences only reinforced the administration's stance. On the other hand,

> Many *RFE* officials regarded *Radio Liberty* with an air of superiority. They considered the Russians and other Soviet nationalities as culturally inferior to East Europeans. They suspected that *RL*'s programs lacked the level of professionalism that *RFE* had achieved. They believed that many *RL* staff were political extremists who knew little about radio work. They also suspected that RL was much more tightly controlled by the CIA than was *Radio Free Europe* (Puddington, 2000).

So, the Balts could find their way to the imagined "elite club" of international broadcasting only through an unconventional route. In contrast, the management of *RL* demonstrated greater openness to collaboration. It is possible that ongoing discussions in Washington regarding the potential closure of *RL* due to budgetary concerns may have influenced the administration to be more receptive; expanding broadcasts and reaching new audiences could have strengthened *RL*'s position.

A seemingly straightforward administrative question regarding the placement of Baltic services on the administrative map of US broadcasting carried significant political implications. The United States and other Western governments never formally recognized the loss of independence by Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In fact, the Baltic states maintained diplomatic representatives in Washington, London, and the Vatican. For some Lithuanian emigres, the existence of a Lithuanian service within *RL* represented an imagined departure from the nonrecognition policy, which was viewed as risky. However, prevailing opinion suggested that broadcasting under the auspices of *RL* was preferable to not broadcasting at all.

Symptomatically, Soviet counter-propaganda never exploited the affiliation of the Baltic services with RL to argue that the West acknowledged the legality of the annexation of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. This topic was deemed too sensitive and potentially inflammatory for Soviet authorities to address, rendering nuances unimportant. Nonetheless, *RFE* and *RL* eventually merged into a single corporation, and in 1984, the Baltic services were symbolically moved to *RFE*. It marked another triumph for Baltic political activism.

The third accusation levied by Soviet propaganda was that "the radios" served as a sanctuary for Nazi criminals and collaborators — individuals deemed traitors to their "Socialist Homeland" — who sought to evade justice and retribution. However, the reality witnessed by ordinary people in occupied territories told a different story: tens of thousands of their fellow citizens fled from the horrors of communist repression and deportations to Siberia.

Soviet propaganda thrived on oversimplification, branding anyone who opposed the Red Army as Nazis. This broad label was indiscriminately applied to various groups, including soldiers of the Russian Liberation Army (*'Vlasovites'*), who helped liberate Prague from Nazis; members of the Home Army (*'Armia Krajowa'*), who fought in the Warsaw Uprising; and participants of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force (*Vietinė Rinktinė*), many of whom were arrested and de-

ported to concentration camps like Salaspils. In Russia, World War Two is remembered as the Great Patriotic War, and former officers of General Andrey Vlasov's troops — some of whom worked in the Russian service of *RL* — were vilified as traitors. Similarly, supporters of Stepan Bandera were labelled as Ukrainian nationalists. Communist propaganda routinely downplayed the suffering of Jews during the Holocaust, often referring to their burial sites as "graves of Soviet citizens." However, in the defamation campaign against the radios, the accusation of being "killers of Jews" was frequently employed. Declassified KGB documents unveil that fomenting conflicts between various émigré groups was a favoured tactic of Soviet intelligence. They covertly orchestrated actions among influential Jewish organisations and certain Lithuanian émigré groups (KGB, 1979, 1980). Notably, infamous conflicts between ethnic Russians and Russian Jews within the Russian service of the radios, as described by former KGB operative Oleg Kalugin, were exacerbated by agents like Tumanov, renowned for spreading rumours and disinformation (Puddington, 2000).

It would not be an exaggeration to assert that most of the attempts by Soviet propaganda to discredit the broadcasters of "the Voices" ultimately proved unsuccessful. This campaign of discreditation could be characterised as a well-designed and consistently executed effort that sought to exploit the mechanism of cognitive dissonance. Soviet propaganda went to great lengths to implant doubts in the minds of radio listeners: Could the messages produced and disseminated by these broadcasters, purportedly influenced by dark forces, emigrants disconnected from reality, foreign intelligence agents, or Nazi criminals, be trusted? The answer to this question was not as straightforward as it may appear today.

However, the most crucial point to note is that while Soviet propaganda was theoretically grounded in the concept of cognitive dissonance, its execution was flawed. While it could influence audiences within closed societies, those who had access to broadcasts from outside could easily discern the inconsistencies and contradictions within

the propaganda against the Radios. For instance, if the émigrés staffing the radios were portrayed as detached from reality, why bother jamming their broadcasts? Similarly, if American secret services were controlling the radios, why would they allegedly harbour former Nazis? These contradictions in Soviet propaganda became glaringly evident after the cessation of jamming, and the radios became part of everyday life in former communist-ruled countries. The broadcasters from behind the ruined iron curtain attained an iconic status. Their voices were recognized on the streets, although sometimes with confusion.

The Myth of the Message

Simultaneously with the permanent discreditation of international broadcasters, Soviet propaganda targeted the messages delivered daily by "the Voices". Attacking the message was a more complicated task than attacking the messenger. The sluggish Soviet propaganda apparatus was centralised and hesitant to make decisions at lower levels. Always awaiting commands from higher authorities (often from Moscow) resulted in delayed Soviet counter-propaganda measures. The Soviet media consistently lagged behind "the Voices" in terms of speed: broadcasters from behind the Iron Curtain were quicker to inform about local events than local media itself. Moreover, Soviet local or central media seldom reported on contradictory events, such as protests, dissident activities or accidents. Unable to compete with the speed of information dissemination, Soviet propaganda resorted to prohibiting the listening of international broadcasting. Communists (not without reason) believed that the most effective means of counter-propaganda were the most primitive ones, with jamming being a primary tactic.

However, jamming was resource-intensive, expensive, and provided no guarantee that the entire territory of the Soviet empire was free from Western radio reach. Ironically, for "the Voices," technical interference could be interpreted as "a measure of their effectiveness" (Snyder, 2012). Jamming became a kind of technical "arms race" in the ether: the West built new broadcasting facilities, while the East introduced

new jamming stations. It is reported that the costs of jamming for the Soviets exceeded the expenses of Americans for broadcasting (Pleikys, 1998). The prospect of introducing new technologies, such as satellite TV, which could resist jamming, instilled horror in the minds of communist ideologues. One high-ranking executive of the USIA (United States Information Agency), Alvin Snyder, referred to it as "a Faustian bargain," noting that

> the new technology provided totalitarian governments with a new tool with which to control and manipulate public opinion, on an unprecedented scale. On the other [hand], using the new technology meant those same governments would be subjected to greater domestic and international scrutiny, reducing their ability to control what their citizens saw and heard. Soviet officials knew that information coming in from the West would quickly debunk their own version of events. They feared that people would get angry when they learned how much they had been deceived (Snyder, 2012).

However, this challenge emerged in the 1980s, and the physical expansion of TV "without borders" coincided with the fall of communism in Europe, meaning the Soviets were never seriously confronted with the pressure of the new media.

At the beginning of the Cold War, the Soviets enjoyed another technical "advantage": radio receivers were not widely available. Three consecutive occupations heavily reduced the availability of radio sets in Lithuania, as the Soviets in 1940 and 1944, and the Nazis in 1941, made concerted efforts to seize all means of radio communication from the population. In the western part of the Soviet Union, restrictions on the ownership of radio receivers persisted long after the end of the war (Laukaitytė, 2019). However, people were eager to protect their property, and a large number of receivers secretly remained in the hands of their original owners. Nevertheless, the advancement of technology inevitably led to the widespread adoption of radio receivers, and by

the 1960s or 1970s, they had become an integral part of every family. Strangely, for a period of time, the lack of radio receivers in Lithuania (which the West was unable to verify) served as an excuse for RFE to abandon the idea of broadcasting to the Baltic states.

Against the Communists' intentions, the scarcity of news and the limitations on their reception only encouraged the population to seek alternatives. Listening to broadcasts from the West became the simplest solution. Furthermore, ordinary people remembered a time of relatively free media from the period between the two World Wars. Additionally, we should not underestimate the simple psychological assumption that forbidden fruits are sweeter.

The repression of authorities against listeners of "the Voices" yielded no desirable effects. Despite the attempts of the Communist Party and their secret services operating under different names (Cheka, GPU, NKVD, MGB, MVD, or KGB), their ability to control all spheres of societal life was limited. The persecution of "the Voices" listeners varied in intensity and success, depending on the level of freedom during different periods of Communist rule. There were even brief spans of "soft dictatorship" when jamming of the VOA or the British broadcaster BBC (which had no programs in Lithuanian) was temporarily halted. However, such appeasement never extended to RFE/RL.

Even for the security services, which promoted their image of almightiness, it was impossible to identify all the listeners of "the Voices". Therefore, the attention was focused on cases of collective listening, which were not only easier to identify but also could be interpreted as open challenges to the existing system. However, the most hostile "crime" was to record or transcribe the broadcasts with the intention of further dissemination. Such actions could be considered punishable offences, tantamount to the distribution of hostile propaganda or the organisation of underground groups with the intention to overthrow the system.

The messages conveyed by the Radios to their target countries could be categorised into several distinct types. Reports on international poli-

tics and the lives of emigrant communities were relatively straightforward to prepare and were received with great respect by listeners. The majority of the audience within the Soviet Union, consisting mainly of laypeople, held a collective belief that everyday life in the West was much more comfortable. Household appliances or clothing imported from abroad became indisputable evidence of the West's superiority. Consequently, official Soviet propaganda emphasising the successful fulfilment of routine five-year plans was often met with concealed scepticism, while the messages delivered by "the Voices" were reluctantly acknowledged. The stark dissonance between the theoretical tenets of Communism and the harsh realities of Soviet life posed a formidable challenge for local propaganda efforts, while simultaneously presenting an open field for Western influence.

Reporting on Soviet life for "the Voices" presented considerable challenges. Obtaining information from behind the Iron Curtain required international broadcasters to meticulously monitor Soviet official media and draw their own conclusions due to the stringent censorship in place. Radio employees often attempted to gather insights from Soviet tourists, who were frequently hesitant to speak openly. This method of information gathering particularly irked the KGB, as it was perceived as genuine intelligence work and sometimes misconstrued as an attempt to lure Soviet citizens to defect to the West. The impressions of legally emigrated individuals or those who escaped the Soviet Union could not be a permanent source of information, as the Communist regime rarely permitted people to leave the country. Moreover, those who did manage to leave often refrained from speaking out due to concerns for the safety of their relatives who remained behind, essentially held as hostages by the regime. Despite these challenges, a dissident movement persisted, with underground newspapers such as "Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Kronika" (The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania) playing a significant role. This publication, active from 1972 to 1989, meticulously documented the injustices and crimes committed by the Soviet authorities, with a particular focus on religious restric-

tions and repression of Catholics. Recognized for its factual accuracy, the publication also published collective appeals to Soviet authorities. "Lietuvos Katalikų Bažnyčios Kronika" served as an invaluable source of information for all "the Voices," with broadcasters often relying on its reporting or referencing it in their own broadcasts.

Historical readings played a crucial role for radio broadcasters. For example, Kęstutis Girnius during his tenure at RFE/RL conducted extensive research on the Lithuanian guerrilla movement and regularly presented his findings in broadcasts. Subsequently, this research was compiled and edited into a book (Girnius, 1988), which stood as one of the few independent studies on the guerrilla movement in Lithuania for a significant period. Notably, Girnius's approach was methodologically rigorous, drawing primarily from official Soviet data and research. However, his critical analysis led to markedly different conclusions than those presented in official narratives.

One of the most formidable challenges encountered by the radios lay in the cognitive realm. Soviet official discourse proved to be in conflict with reality, however served as a background for deliberations. Official history books, researchers, and media articles were all founded upon "facts" predominantly known on only one side of the Iron Curtain. These "facts" were incessantly reiterated by communist propaganda, leaving little room for alternative perspectives. In such a context, even historical narratives presented by "the Voices" often seemed incredulous to listeners living under constant pressure of official lies. For instance, the Katyn massacre, extensively documented in Soviet history books, was portrayed within a Nazi framework, depicting it as a war crime committed by German troops. Consequently, when communist propaganda touted the enduring friendship between the Soviet Union and Poland, the revelation of tens of thousands of Polish prisoners of war being executed by NKVD troops stretched the bounds of imagination. Similarly, the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which laid the groundwork for the Baltic annexation, appeared as if concocted from a conspiracy theory. This scepticism was further fuelled by Soviet

historians' unanimous assertions that no relevant documents existed in Moscow archives, dismissing all evidence as mere forgeries.

While the mass deportations of thousands of innocent Balts to Siberia by Soviet occupants were undeniably real and deeply ingrained in collective memory, the official discourse surrounding these events was heavily influenced by Leninist ideology, particularly the theory of "class struggle." This ideological framework permeated various forms of cultural expression, including scientific literature, fiction, poetry, art, and film, all of which sought to reinforce the narrative of "class struggle" as a means of justifying the actions of the Soviet regime. The concept of "class struggle" provided a convenient explanation for the brutal repressions carried out by the occupiers, often casting these atrocities within the framework of a biblical struggle akin to Cain and Abel. Such narratives served to rationalise how brothers could find themselves pitted against each other and how the ruthless repression by occupiers could be framed as a necessary component of ideological conflict. From these discussions emerged the most insidious arguments of Soviet propaganda, aimed at undermining the credibility of the messages disseminated by "the Voices". By leveraging the narrative of "class struggle," Soviet propaganda sought to discredit any oppositional voices and reinforce conformity among the populace.

At the outset of the Cold War, Lithuania experienced a period of intense conflict characterised by guerrilla warfare that persisted until 1953. This resistance movement was accompanied by widespread repression, deportations, and forced collectivization. The longevity of this resistance, particularly in the poorest regions of Lithuania, posed a significant ideological challenge for communist propaganda, as it contradicted the narrative of class struggle promoted by the Soviet regime. During later stages of the Cold War, Soviet propaganda propagated a myth that "the Voices" disseminated false promises of assistance from the West, thereby perpetuating a futile struggle destined for defeat from the outset. International broadcasters were accused of inciting false hope by suggesting imminent intervention by American or Brit-

ish forces. The stereotypical message conveyed by "the Voices" often involved promises of liberation by the next Easter or Christmas, leading to accusations that they were complicit in the deaths of partisans engaged in a meaningless struggle. This propaganda strategy reflected a characteristic shift in Soviet thinking, deflecting blame away from the perpetrators of violence and towards their victims.

It's remarkable how successful Soviet propaganda was in perpetuating the myth of false radio messages during the guerrilla war. *RFE/RL* began broadcasting in Lithuanian only in 1975, a decade after the death of the last guerrilla fighter and more than two decades after the peak of resistance. Similarly, the *VOA* commenced its Lithuanian broadcasts in 1951, by which time the peak of resistance had already passed. During this complex post-war period, *Radio Vaticana* was the primary international broadcaster transmitting in Lithuanian. Given its focus on religious themes, it was able to deliver the most nuanced and "soft" messages compared to other broadcasters.

Research conducted by Arlauskaitė-Zakšauskienė (Zakšauskienė, 2015) reveals that international broadcasters had no opportunities to disseminate promises to the guerrillas. Furthermore, American broadcasters were bound by clear instructions that strictly prohibited them from encouraging resistance or fostering hopes of liberation among the populations of enslaved countries. Despite this, numerous claims of hearing promises of quick liberation on the radio are documented in contemporary diaries and later memoirs. Regina Laukaitytė suggests that such claims should not be dismissed outright (Laukaitytė, 2019). However, it's important to note that people were not solely listening to broadcasts in Lithuanian. Girnius suggests that Moscow's propaganda, with its perpetual discourse on irreconcilable social orders, played a significant role in stoking hopes for war, overshadowing the influence of Western radio reports (Girnius, 1988).

These contradictions between factual evidence and personal recollections may be attributed to the peculiarities of communication. Often, individuals hear what they wish to hear rather than what is actually said.

During the prolonged struggle against a formidable adversary, numerous rumours circulated among the populace. Much of the information conveyed through unofficial channels was steeped in wishful thinking and speculation. However, despite the inherent unreliability of such sources, broadcasts played a crucial role in sustaining morale. A notable example is found in a letter penned by Lithuanian Catholics addressed to Pope Pius XII and delivered to the West by guerrilla fighters Juozas Lukša and Kazimieras Pyplys in 1948. Among its requests was a plea to increase the frequency of Lithuanian broadcasts by *Radio Vaticana*. The letter emphasised the importance of these broadcasts in providing information about the suffering endured by the Lithuanian people, affirming their worthiness to receive recognition for their steadfast commitment to their faith amidst adversity (Gaškaitė, 1997).

The administration and broadcasters of *RFE/RL* were acutely aware of the challenges inherent in broadcasting news to societies under totalitarian control. As Puddington aptly noted, there is

> a risk in broadcasting even straight news reports to societies under totalitarian control, whose only recourse to misrule is resistance, violent or otherwise. Under totalitarian conditions, people are prone to hear what they want to hear. Where a Western audience will understand a politician's ritual denunciation of tyranny for what it is, a person living in a state of oppression may interpret boilerplate rhetoric as a promise of help (Puddington, 2000).

Acknowledging these dangers, however, does not always ensure successful navigation of them. *RFE*'s Hungarian service, for instance, faced criticism for its role during the 1956 Budapest uprising, when "the challenge for *RFE* was to support the goals of the revolution through honest, nonpolemical reporting, to provide a realistic evaluation of the international response to Hungary's plight, and to avoid becoming a participant in the upheaval" (Puddington, 2000). Unfortunately, *RFE* fell short of these goals during the uprising. However, during the

Prague Spring of 1968, international broadcasters, including *RFE/RL*, demonstrated a commendable commitment to honesty and integrity in their reporting.

Over time, *RFE/RL* was able to carve out its unique role in the landscape of international broadcasting. It "was not only significant as a broadcaster but even more as a place of verification and stabilisation of knowledge" (Grutza, 2019).

This established role came under serious revision once Mikhail Gorbachev launched his reform program of perestroika and glasnost. To no surprise, given the lessons of history, the Balts exercised caution. As Girnius, director of the Lithuanian service, explained: "We were sensitive to the Western proclivity to treat each successive Soviet leader, from Malenkov to Andropov, as a reformer. [...] Given that history, we were skeptical about Gorbachev for some time" (Puddington, 2000). To avoid repeating the mistakes made by colleagues during the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and to apply the lessons learned during the Prague Spring, the Lithuanian service "stressed the distinctions among a newspaper editorial, the declaration of a member of Congress, and an official State Department position". It was rather complicated "to explain the realpolitik behind the official statements — why, for example, America might not want to support Baltic independence, given its stake in Gorbachev's survival". The broadcasters did their best "to explain why Denmark could openly support independence, but why Germany might be less enthusiastic". The principal objective was "to give a realistic picture of the outside world's thinking" (Puddington, 2000).

The peak of testing for this mission occurred in January 1991, when Soviet troops launched attacks in Vilnius targeting the TV tower, *Lithuanian National Radio and TV* (now called *LRT*) headquarters, and other infrastructure, killing innocent people. Tens of thousands congregated around Parliament, which less than a year earlier had declared the restoration of Lithuanian independence but was now under pressure from Moscow to resign. During this crisis, the *RFE/RL* Lithuanian service maintained a permanent telephone connection with the parliament

building, where stringer Audrius Siaurusevičius provided continuous updates. The Moscow-led attack in Vilnius coincided with the eve of the First Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm, diverting the world's attention to developments in the Middle East. In this critical moment, first-hand information from Vilnius delivered by a reputable Western media organisation like *RFE/RL* played a crucial role not only on the international stage but also within Lithuania itself. With Soviet troops blocking local TV and radio broadcasts, *RFE/RL*, still operating on shortwaves, alongside other "Voices," emerged as a primary source of information for the country's inhabitants.

The journalistic standards and commitment to impartiality served as the rationale for continuing RFE/RL Baltic services even after the international recognition of the independence of these states. In 1995, when RFE/RL headquarters relocated from Munich to Prague, the Baltic services, along with those for Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria, continued broadcasting until 2004, coinciding with these states' accession to NATO membership.

During the decades of the Cold War, the KGB conducted continuous analysis of *RFE/RL* broadcasts, which led to the categorization of American broadcasting to Soviet-occupied Lithuania into distinct periods based on the tone of the programs. The *VOA* broadcasts commenced in 1951, and the initial decade was referred to as a period of "rude insinuations," during which Soviet monitoring indicated that the radio offered advice on how to respond to the events of the new socialist life. From the early 1960s, the KGB observed new trends that were associated with President Kennedy's policies, characterised as "bridge building." From the Soviet perspective, propaganda became more flexible, aiming to instil hope that the capitalist way of life would triumph over communism. The tone of broadcasting became more nuanced. By the mid-1970s, the KGB described international broadcasts as exemplifying indirect reaction. Soviet analysts clandestinely acknowledged that reports were based on factual information, aimed to convey objectivity, foster distrust in Soviet media, generate interest among listeners, and

catered to different audiences, primarily intellectuals and the younger generation (KGB, 1974a). Many years later, a careful observer of these processes could draw a clear conclusion: "*RFE* became a trustworthy medium fostering the solidarity of an imagined community that shared the same national consciousness" (Grutza, 2019).

RL commenced broadcasting in Lithuanian during the "calm period" when resistance movements went deep underground. The last significant display of dissatisfaction in Lithuania, known as the Kaunas Spring of 1972, occurred before *RL* Lithuanian broadcasts began. These broadcasts continued throughout the years of Brezhnev's stagnation. The Soviet war in Afghanistan and subsequent shifts in American policy under President Ronald Reagan injected new vigour into "the Voices." The uncompromising fight against the "evil empire" provided fresh inspiration for the broadcasters, yet they remained cautious, intent on preserving their hard-won independence. They "considered itself to be a partner and not servant of the American government" (Grutza, 2019).

The KGB "research" offers a rather clear depiction of *RFE/RL* activities, citing official radio documents outlining the objective of the broadcasts: "to provide Lithuanians with objective, uncensored information in their native language." Special emphasis is placed on the "preservation and development of cultural values and national unity to realise the full potential of human rights and democratic liberties." Editors are depicted as not adhering to any specific political line or making final decisions regarding what is best for Lithuanians residing in their native land. It is also emphasised that the broadcasts should refrain from inciting direct actions, leaving it to Lithuanians to decide the best means to address "the problem of Lithuania" in their own way.

The Soviet special services meticulously analysed international broadcasts, regularly submitting their reviews to the highest-ranking communist functionaries. According to KGB reports, broadcasts in Lithuanian consisted of various content: 50 percent comprised materials from emigrant press, 19 percent consisted of daily news, 15 percent featured news analysis, over 15 percent was dedicated to readings primarily from "Lietu-

vos Katalikų Bažnyčios Kronika" (*'The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania'*), and the remaining 15 percent included announcements, reviews, and entertainment for the youth. Overall, 70 percent of all broadcasts focused on life in Lithuania, 12 percent covered events in socialist states, and the rest analysed questions of international politics. Interviews with emigration leaders played a significant role in the broadcasts, and on Saturdays and Sundays, programs on religious topics were also featured. The content of broadcasts targeted at Latvia and Estonia was more or less similar. This "analysis" confirms the success of the radios in implementing the so-called surrogate radio model, wherein listeners could cultivate the feeling that they were tuning in to a local radio station, focused on local needs and centred on their issues, rather than a voice from afar or from above. "Because of the surrogate nature of its programming, *RFE/RL* was perceived by listeners as more interested in their daily lives, more sympathetic to their pro- independence aspirations, and more anti-soviet than *VOA*" (Johnson & Parta, 2010).

The KGB displayed a particular interest in the fact-gathering and analysis conducted by *RL*. A secret report reveals that the Research Department of RL collected information regarding listenership of the broadcasts in the Baltic region. It was observed that the possibility of listening to the broadcasts was relatively good in rural areas and occasionally in certain towns. However, in cities, the broadcasts were often jammed. The Research Department received unofficial data and responses from over 80 Soviet citizens (including 11 former citizens), who asserted that the appeal of *RL* broadcasts in the Baltics stemmed from the fact that they were delivered in their native language. Additionally, the broadcasts served as a source of additional information and were not only listened to by convinced anti-communists but also by some supporters of the Soviet system. Lithuanian dissidents who had emigrated to the West, such as T. Venclova and Kęstutis Jokubynas (later deputy director of the Lithuanian service), reported that they too were listeners of RL and provided valuable recommendations regarding the broadcasts in Lithuanian.

The KGB eagerly identified the difficulties faced by the radios, as revealed in their analysis. *RFE/RL* expressed concerns about the shortage of qualified personnel, exemplified by the Lithuanian service where only four positions were permanently occupied out of the available five. Another challenge was obtaining information about the situation in the Soviet Baltic republics. To address this challenge, staff members were instructed not only to analyse newspapers and magazines from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania but also to utilise Jews and Germans who were allowed to leave the Soviet Baltic republics to gather tendentious information. They were also advised to establish contacts with Baltic Germans residing in West Germany, who often visited the region as tourists.

It can be argued that the Soviet authorities overestimated the capabilities and coordination of Western broadcasts to the Baltic states. "They perceived *RFE/RL* as an integral part of a smoothly functioning, highly centralized Western propaganda system. However, despite some efforts at cooperation between individual broadcasters, the reality was far from what the Soviets believed" (Johnson & Parta, 2010).

Conclusions

The history of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (*RFE/RL*) and its Lithuanian Service underscores a profound disparity between perceptions fuelled by Soviet propaganda and the actuality of their journalistic autonomy and integrity. Despite facing allegations of being mere mouthpieces of emigres disconnected from the realities of their native land, instruments of Western intelligence, or collaborators with Nazi forces, *RFE/RL* steadfastly maintained its independence and credibility, offering alternative news to audiences behind the Iron Curtain. Throughout the Cold War, *RFE/RL* encountered a multitude of challenges, ranging from accusations propagated by Soviet propaganda to debates within the U.S. Congress regarding funding, alongside attempts at infiltration by Soviet authorities. Nevertheless, *RFE/RL* remained resolute in its mission to counter communist propaganda and bolster aspirations for democracy and independence in regions under Soviet

control. The analysis further underscores the futility of Soviet propaganda in mitigating the influence of Western radio broadcasts. Despite concerted efforts such as jamming and disinformation campaigns, Western broadcasts disseminated objective news and provided glimpses into life beyond the Iron Curtain, ultimately eroding trust in official propaganda and nurturing a thirst for unfettered access to information. The enduring impact of *RFE/RL* in shaping public opinion and precipitating the downfall of totalitarian regimes remains palpable. Their pivotal role as indispensable purveyors of information and symbols of liberty during the Cold War underscores their enduring legacy in championing democracy and dismantling authoritarian narratives. Even in the post-Cold War era, Western radio broadcasts persist in their significant role of buttressing democratic movements and furnishing objective information to societies ensnared by totalitarian rule. This underscores the perennial relevance of *RFE/RL*'s mission in advancing democracy and safeguarding human rights on a global scale[1].

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